

PSALMS

Chapter 144

My Rock and My Fortress

Of David.

Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle; 2 he is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me. 3 O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? 4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow. 5 Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke! 6 Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them! 7 Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of foreigners, 8 whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. 9 I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you, 10 who gives victory to kings, who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword. 11 Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. 12 May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace; 13 may our granaries be full, providing all kinds of produce; may our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; 14 may our cattle be heavy with young, suffering no mishap or failure in bearing; may there be no cry of distress in our streets! 15 Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!

Ps 144 A royal prayer for victory over treacherous enemies . Verses 1–10 show much affinity with Ps 18; this section begins and ends like that psalm, and vv. 5–7 all appear to be variations on corresponding lines found there (see notes below). The remaining lines of this section contain similar echoes of other psalms, and the author may have drawn directly on them. The main body (vv. 1–10) is fairly typical of the prayers of the Psalter, but the conclusion (vv. 12–15) is unique. Verse 11 appears to be transitional. (CSB)

Joyful song of victory by King David—who mentions his own name in v 10—after defeating enemies in battle.

Format: Vv 1–2, the Lord as trainer for war; vv 3–4, the people are like a breath; vv 5–8, call for the Lord to come down; vv 9–11, song for victory; vv 12–15, blessings. (TLSB)

The 144th psalm is a psalm of thanks for kings and those in authority. David, a king who has to wage war and rule, gives thanks to God with this psalm. He confesses that victory, good fortune, and success – whether in conflict or in government – are the gifts of God and do not come from human power and ability. Little does human wisdom know how to keep subjects under authority and to rule land and people well. For how should he be capable of these great things when he is nothing and passes away like a shadow?

Instead, the Lord does this. He sends for the lightning – sending discouraged and frightened hearts to the army and humble hearts among the people. Where he thus touches the mountains and the multitudes, so that they are in fear before him, there it is good to fight and rule, for there victory

and good fortune follow – as well as this fear. Yet how can one, being only flesh and blood bring about this fear?

Then he prays against his own people and rebukes their foolishness. For the people of Israel, having the renown of being the people of God, were nevertheless, proud, stiff-necked, disobedient, rebellious, covetous, jealous, and faithless, as indeed they showed by their opposition to Moses, David and other kings. And though they saw that David fought and ruled with miraculous wonders, as did Moses, yet they were no better and did not inquire about God or faith in God.

“What God? What faith? As long as we have beautiful children, houses, cattle, many possessions, and enjoyable days, we are a blessed people. And in addition, we have prophets enough, who teach us that God’s people are those for whom things go well. Those for whom things go badly are not of God.” However, things do go badly for all the saints – for the reason that they trust in God.

You have now rescued me, David says, from the murderous sword of Goliath. You have given me victory over other kings. Therefore, preserve me also from this ungodly, evil false people, who listen to neither God nor man. They are peasants and brutes, yes, truly swine, who are concerned for nothing but their own belly. It is harder and more dangerous to rule over them than to continually be at war.

He calls them foreign children, for they want to be the foremost children of God, yet they are foreigners, strangers, and worse than heathen. They praise God with their mouths, while their heart is far from him. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

144:1–2 Praise of the Lord. As the opening words of a prayer, it seems to function both as an initial appeal (see 143:1–2) and as a confession of confidence that the prayer will be heard. Notice the unusual piling up of epithets for God—all having their counterparts in Ps 18. (CSB)

This psalm is a fitting conclusion to the Davidic collection since it reflects the period of David’s triumph during which he was fully in control of the kingdom. (PBC)

144:1 *hands...fingers* – The emphasis on “hands” and “fingers” is a figurative way of focusing on his complete involvement in battle. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

for war. God is the source of the abilities we exercise in our various callings. God has achieved the victory by means of the warrior-king. (TLSB)

144:2 *he is my steadfast love.* Lit. “my unfailing love” ; so called because God is the source of benevolent acts of love that David can count on—just as God can be called “my salvation” because he is the source of salvation (see 27:1; 35:3; 62:2). (CSB)

my shield – This affirms that the Lord is the one who protects him from injury and harm in battle. The reason that the God protects him, of course, is that he has taken refuge in him. The verb “to take refuge” (s.v Ps. 7:1) compares the idea of taking refuge, such as in a storm or in a battle, to the simple idea of trusting in the Lord. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

144:3–4 Confession of man’s insignificance and of his dependence on God’s help. (CSB)

Despite his victory, the king feels his insignificance, marveling at God's gracious regard for a mere human being, whose life is short and insubstantial. Cf Heb 2:6–8, which ties “the son of man” to Christ. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Because he has a foretaste of Your love he does not blush to make return of love. Now in Your brightness it becomes clear, Oh! Light ... [the psalmist] loves not undeservedly, because he was loved without deserving it; and his love is for everlasting, because he knows that he has been loved from everlasting” (*SLSB*, p 155). (TLSB)

144:3 *what is man* – The words are taken from Psalm 8:5 where the psalmist marvels how God condescends to help human. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

144:4 A prayer for understanding and patient acceptance of the brief span of human life. – A nation's strength must be in the Lord. (PBC)

144:5–8 Prayer for deliverance. (CSB)

144:5 The Lord came to the aid of his servant—depicted as a fearful theophany (divine manifestation) of the heavenly Warrior descending in wrathful attack upon David's enemies. He sweeps down upon them like a fierce thunderstorm. (CSB)

The king prays for a theophany, that God would descend to the earth and appear in His holiness; he asks for an event, as at Sinai (Ex 19:16–18), that would be accompanied by terrifying storms and volcano-like eruptions. (TLSB)

144:6 For shafts of lightning as the arrows of God. (CSB)

This poetry, with parallelism and figurative language, speaks of the bolts of lightning as God's arrows. (TLSB)

144:7 Powerful imagery for threatening forces or circumstances. This and related imagery are found in ancient Near Eastern creation myths. In many of these a primal mass of chaotic waters (their threatening and destructive forces were often depicted as a many-headed monster of the deep had to be subdued by the creator-god before he could fashion the world and/or rule as the divine king over the earth. Though in these myths the chaotic waters were subdued when the present world was created, they remained a constant threat to the security and well-being of the present order in the earth (the world in which man lives). Hence by association they were linked with anything that in human experience endangered or troubled that order. They were also associated with the sea, whose angry waves seemed determined at times to engulf the land. Imagery drawn from sea and death, sometimes side by side, was used by OT poets to depict threats and distress. (CSB)

foreigners. Bordering kingdoms. (CSB)

Hostile nations that surround Israel and with which the king is at war. (TLSB)

144:8 *mouths* – The most frequent weapon used against the psalmists is the tongue. (CSB)

right hands. Hands raised to swear covenant oaths of allegiance or submission (see 106:26; Ex 6:8; Dt 32:40). (CSB)

As a parallel to “lies,” these words picture those who raise their hand in an oath, but swear falsely. (TLSB)

144:9–10 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)

144:9 *new song*. – Celebrating God’s saving act. (CSB)

It means that he will sing a song of praise for a “new” answer to prayer. A new favor from God will inspire a new praise. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

David was a skilled harpist (1Sm 16:23). (TLSB)

144:11 Repetition of the prayer in vv. 7–8, apparently to serve as transition to what follows: If God will deliver his servant David, the realm will prosper and be secure. (CSB)

Repetition of vv 7–8, emphasizing the need for God’s intervention. (TLSB)

144:12–15 Many believe this to be a separate prayer (“May our sons”), unrelated to vv. 1–11, but the apparently transitional function of v. 11 supports the NIV rendering. (CSB)

One of the most important products any society can produce is a generation of children who have not only physical strength and health, but also moral and spiritual strength. Children who have such strength are like well-nurtured plants and steady pillars, since they will be a joy and a blessing to their parents and the society in which they live. (PBC)

144:12 *daughters like pillars carved*. Temple columns in the shape of women were not uncommon (e.g., on the Acropolis in Athens). (CSB)

Prayer that their children may reach their full stature and potential, as the chief blessing of prosperity for God’s people. (TLSB)

144:13 *thousands . . . ten thousands*. Poetic for the idea of multiplying without number. (TLSB)

144:14 *our cattle be heavy with young*. Or “our oxen will be heavy with flesh” or “our oxen will be heavy with young” – Our chieftains will be firmly established.) (CSB)

144:15 *Blessed* – People with material prosperity are blessed, but even more blessed are those who know God, the source of every blessing. (TLSB)

Ps 144 We are indeed like a breath, a shadow, before God. In our sins—such as our propensity for lying and swearing falsely, as mentioned here—we are God’s enemies. And yet, God shows us His favor, despite our insignificance, particularly through the Son of Man, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. The Church has historically seen this psalm as foreshadowing Christ, our true King.
• Blessed are You, Lord Christ, our King! You have come down to us, not in Your glory, but as one of us. You have won the victory over sin, the devil, and death itself. May we share Your victory and its blessings as we cling to You in faith. Amen. (TLSB)