

PSALMS

Chapter 31

In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. ⁶ I hate those who may regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD. ⁷ I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, ⁸ and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place. ⁹ Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. ¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. ¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. ¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. ¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. ¹⁴ But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” ¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! ¹⁶ Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love! ¹⁷ O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol. ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt. ¹⁹ Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! ²⁰ In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues. ²¹ Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. ²² I had said in my alarm, “I am cut off from your sight.” But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help. ²³ Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. ²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!

Ps 31 A prayer for deliverance when confronted by a conspiracy so powerful and open that all David's friends abandoned him. According to Lk 23:46, Jesus on the cross applied Ps 31:5 to his own circumstances; thus those who share in his sufferings at the hands of anti-Christian forces are encouraged to hear and use this psalm in a new light (see Ac 7:59; 1Pe 4:19). No psalm expresses a more sturdy trust in the Lord when powerful human forces threaten. The heart of the prayer itself is found in vv. 9–18, which is both preceded and followed by eight Hebrew poetic lines—stanzas that resound with the theme of trust (see v. 14). Verse 13, at the center of the psalm, expresses most clearly the prayer's occasion. (CSB)

Perhaps written when Saul's forces were pursuing David (e.g., 1Sm 23). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, prayer for rescue; vv 3–5, confession of God's care; vv 6–8, joy in God's rescue; vv 9–10, effects of iniquity; vv 11–13, adversaries; vv 14–18, prayer for rescue; vv 19–20, goodness stored up; vv 21–22, prayer under siege; vv 23–24, take courage. (TLSB)

31 title *For the director of music.* (Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself. (CSB)

31:1–5 Initial appeal to the Lord, the faithful refuge. (CSB)

31:1 *In you O Lord do I take refuge* – By these words the psalmist makes it clear from the very outset that he has placed his life in the Lord’s care. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

righteousness. 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.). (CSB)

Luth: “It does not say ‘in my’ but ‘in thy righteousness,’ that is, in the righteousness of Christ my God which becomes ours through faith and by the grace and mercy of God” (AE 31:299). (TLSB)

31:2 *rescue me speedily* – “haste, speed” is used adverbially; in Josh. 8:19 it has the sens of an immediate action. The psalm will explain that his weakened condition is the reason for the urgency. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

rock. The translation of two different Hebrew words. “Rock” is a common poetic figure for God (or the gods: symbolizing his unfailing strength as a fortress refuge or as deliverer. It is a figure particularly appropriate for David’s experience for the Lord was his true security. (CSB)

strong fortress – Is literally “a house or places of refuge,” which refers to any place where abundant safety of refuge is available. (Leupold)

31:3 *for the sake of your name.* God’s honor is at stake in the safety of his servant now under attack – The prosperity of the Lord’s servant brings honor to the Lord’s name. (CSB)

name. The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. It has no separate existence apart from the Lord, but is synonymous with the Lord himself in his gracious manifestation and accessibility to his people. Hence the Jerusalem temple is the earthly residence of his name among his people. (CSB)

Because God has a history of doing this, and because it is in harmony with his nature, the psalmist expects guidance and deliverance from the Lord. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

lead and guide. As a shepherd – As a shepherd leads his sheep in paths that offer safety and well-being, so David’s Shepherd-King guides him in ways that cause him to be secure and prosperous. For this meaning of “righteousness.” It is also possible that “paths of righteousness” refers to the paths that conform to God’s moral will. (CSB)

He expects God will lead, guide, and rescue him. The verb for rescue is “you will bring me out” from the verb “go out”; he expects that God will bring him out (set him free) from the trap (or snare) that is set for him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

31:4 *trap that is set for me.* By his enemies (see v. 11). (CSB)

Possibly the servants of Saul who sought to apprehend David in 1Sm 23. (TLSB)

The figure “trap” draws on the world of hunting to convey the deceptive plot of his enemies to destroy him. He will need guidance from the Lord not to walk into their trap. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

31:5 *Into your hands I commit my spirit.* The climactic expression of trust in the Lord—quoted by Jesus in Lk 23:46. (CSB)

His life is in God’s hands. The speaker’s suffering, and trust in God, came clearly into focus when Jesus spoke these words from the cross. “It is also useful that we form the habit of daily commending ourselves to God, with soul and body, wife, children, servants, and all that we have, against every need that may arise” (LC I 73). (TLSB)

commit. Lit. “deposit” (as in Jer 36:20, “put”), here in the very hands of God, thus entrusting to God’s care (see Lev 6:4; 1Ki 14:27). (CSB)

The verb “I commit” here has the meaning of entrust (s.v. Ps. 8:4). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

spirit – This is the equivalent of life. (Leupold)

redeem. Here, as often, a synonym for “deliver.” (CSB)

God’s saving redemption puts the rest of life’s challenges in perspective. (TLSB)

God of truth. The faithful, trustworthy God. (CSB)

To your covenant.). – Though spoken while David’s trouble still lay heavy upon him, may well reflect the strong confidence that returns when faith is on the upsurge as happens so often during prayer. (Leupold)

31:6–8 Confession of loyal trust in the Lord, whose past mercies to David when enemies threatened are joyfully recalled. (CSB)

31:6 *hate.* Refuse to be associated with. (CSB)

Rejection of idolatry, not seething hatred of other persons. (TLSB)

31:7 *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 as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

soul. In this verse refers to the psalmist’s entire being, equivalent to the personal pronoun. (CSB)

31:8 *broad place* – where he is free to roam unconfined by the threats and dangers that had hemmed him in. To be afflicted or oppressed is like being bound by fetters. To be delivered is to be set free. (CSB)

31:9–13 The distress described: He is utterly drained physically and emotionally (see vv. 9–10; see also 22:14–15); all his friends have abandoned him like a piece of broken pottery (see vv. 11–12); and all this because the conspiracy against him is so strong (v. 13). (CSB)

31:9 *eye is wasted* – Poetic description for the extent of his tears. We might say he “cried his eyes out.” (TLSB)

A part of his distress is caused by the fact that he knows that his conduct has not been blameless. He asserts that his strength fails because of his iniquity. (Leupold)

The verb “grow weak” or “be consumed” conveys the deterioration from his extreme grief and weakness; the verb expresses essentially that he is falling apart (it is used of garments falling apart in pieces from use or from being moth-eaten). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

soul. In this verse refers to the psalmist’s entire being, equivalent to the personal pronoun “I.” (CSB)

31:10 *because of my iniquity*. His own sin has contributed to his suffering. (TLSB)

bones. As the inner skeleton, they here represent the whole body. (CSB)

31:11–12 Abandonment by friends was a common experience at a time when God seemed to have withdrawn his favor (see 38:11; 41:9; 69:8; 88:8, 18; Job 19:13–19; Jer 12:6; 15:17). (CSB)

31:11 *reproach...especially to my neighbors* – His misery is compounded by the misgivings and suspicions of acquaintances and friends. What the enemies were doing to him caused his neighbors to reproach him. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

31:12 *forgotten*. Other people act as if he is dead, giving no thought to him or his condition. (TLSB)

a broken vessel. Pots that broke during firing or during a fall were a disappointment. They might be further crushed for mortar or used to scrape what you would not touch with your hands (cf Jb 2:7–8). (TLSB)

31:13 *whispering* – For the plots and intrigues of enemies, usually involving lies to discredit the king and bring him down. (CSB)

Those who do remember him are secretly plotting against him. (TLSB)

The writer has the feeling that in every instance where he observes men putting their heads together and whispering, a new plot of evil is afoot against him, a new cause of terror. (Leupold)

they. His enemies, likely Saul’s forces. (TLSB)

terror on every side – The terror that surrounds him made him a dread to other people so that they either avoided him or reproached him. In the process he was filled with grief and despair so that he grew weaker by the day. Only the Lord could rescue him from this terrible crisis. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

31:14–18 His trust in the Lord is unwavering; his defense against his powerful enemies is his reliance on God’s faithfulness and discerning judgment. (CSB)

31:14 *I trust...you are my God* – Both verbs can be translated as present tenses as part of his statement of faith, but if the first is taken as a present perfect it encompasses what he said in the psalm already, that he has trusted the Lord and has been delivered so many times that God is his rock and refuge. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

31:15 *My times are in your hand* – All the events and circumstances of life are in the hands of the Lord, “my God” (v. 14). (CSB)

God is in control every moment. (TLSB)

By “times” he not only means how long he lives but what takes place in the times he lives. He is asking for God to act in accordance with his will for his life. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

No matter what my enemies do against me, I trust in my GOD. Whatever happens in the course of my life is under the providential care of my God. (Leupold)

31:16 *face shine*. When his face shines on a person, blessing and deliverance come. (CSB)

31:17–18 *but let the wicked be put to shame* – 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. (CSB)

31:18 *lying lips*. For the plots and intrigues of enemies, usually involving lies to discredit the king and bring him down. (CSB)

The wicked with their beliefs and their actions claimed to be in the right, implying that the way of the Lord was a lie. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

righteous. One of several terms in the OT for God’s people; it presents them as justified or declared righteous and hence living rightly. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to bless, not to exploit. (CSB)

David does not curse his enemies, but prays that God will deal with their injustice and stop their lies. (TLSB)

31:19–20 Confident anticipation of God’s saving help – 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)

31:19 *stored up*. David deposits his life in the hands of God to share in the covenant benefits that God has stored up for his faithful servants (“goodness”; see Ex 18:9; Nu 10:29, 32; Dt 26:11; Jos

21:45; 23:14–15; 2Ch 6:41; Ne 9:25, 35; Isa 63:7; Jer 33:9; see also Jer 31:12, 14, “bounty”). (CSB)

fear. Those who honor God and order their lives in accordance with his will because of their reverence for him. (CSB)

bestow in the sight of children mankind – Thus showing the Lord’s approval of and his standing with his faithful servants in contrast to the accusations of their adversaries (see 86:17). (CSB)

31:20 *cover them* – As God’s presence protected Israel from the pursuing Egyptian army (Ex 14:19–20), so He protected David. Similarly, Christ covers us with His justifying righteousness. (TLSB)

your shelter – The tabernacle, where God promised to be present, was a place of safety. (TLSB)

strife of tongues – See “slander” (v. 13) and “lying lips” (v. 18). (CSB)

Strife is often a conflict, legal charge or accusation (s.v. Ps. 95:8). The attack is verbal, as the use of “tongues” makes clear; and it is from mere mortals, as the use of “man” says. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

31:21–22 Praise anticipating deliverance.– Here it is possible that David merely recalls this appropriate word from the Lord; notice that it is a general reassurance concerning the righteous rule of God. (CSB)

31:21 *besieged city.* Metaphor for the threat he had experienced. (CSB)

Cf 1Sm 23. After David delivered the city of Keilah from the Philistines, Saul attacked the city, hoping to capture him. (TLSB)

This reference may refer to Saul’s attempt to trap him in Keilah (1 Samuel 23:7,8) or to Absalom’s plan to besiege him in Mahanaim (2 Samuel 17-18). (PBC)

31:22 *cut off from your sight.* When he does hide his face, those who depend on him can only despair. (CSB)

you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy – Now, though he is not yet delivered, he has again won the assurance that his pleas will not go unheard. That hope is enough for him. (Leupold)

Panic gives way to confidence from the Lord’s faithfulness. See FC SD XI 74. (TLSB)

31:23–24 Praise advances to encouragement of the saints (see 62:8). (CSB)

Final word on God’s faithfulness. (TLSB)

31:23 *saints.* It is one of several Hebrew words for God’s people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him. (CSB)

the faithful. † Those who demonstrate their faith with their moral integrity. (CSB)

the proud. Those who refuse to live in humble reliance on the Lord. They arrogantly try to make their way in the world either as a law to themselves (see, e.g., v. 18; 10:2–11; 73:6; 94:2–7; Dt 8:14; Isa 2:17; Eze 28:2, 5; Hos 13:6) or by relying on false gods (see Jer 13:9–10). Hence “the proud” is often equivalent to “the wicked.” (CSB)

31:24 *be strong and let your heart take courage* – To doubt is unwholesome weakness. This phrase also indicates that God’s help is seldom immediately forthcoming. Strength consists in being able to wait till the time comes when it pleases God to send his help. (Leupold)

David applies his experiences to others. God was faithful to him; others who pray to God for deliverance should patiently wait for God to deliver them. (TLSB)

Ps 31 David says that he hates those who trust in worthless idols; he trusts in the Lord (v 6). Too often, we devote our lives to worthless things and despise the things of God. Yet as God delivered David from his sin and enemies, He delivers us as well. Christ paid for our idolatry and indifference. His Spirit gives us the gift of faith so that we trust in the only true God. Now we join David in rejoicing in God’s great salvation. • O triune God, strengthen my faith that I may worship You alone. Amen. (TLSB)