

# PSALM 144

The four preceding psalms seem to have been penned by David before his accession to the crown, when he was persecuted by Saul; this seems to have been penned afterwards, when he was still in trouble (for there is no condition in this world privileged with an exemption from trouble), the neighbouring nations molesting him and giving him disturbance, especially the Philistines, ~~187~~ 2 Samuel 5:17. In this psalm,

**I.** He acknowledges, with triumph and thankfulness, the great goodness of God to him in advancing him to the government (v. 1-4).

**II.** He prays to God to help him against the enemies who threatened him (v. 5-8 and again v. 11).

**III.** He rejoices in the assurance of victory over them (v. 9, 10).

**IV.** He prays for the prosperity of his own kingdom, and pleases himself with the hopes of it (v. 12-15). In singing this psalm we may give God the glory of our spiritual privileges and advancements, and fetch in help from him against our spiritual enemies; we may pray for the prosperity of our souls, of our families, and of our land; and, in the opinion of some of the Jewish writers, we may refer the psalm to the Messiah and his kingdom.

## ~~187~~ PSALM 144:1-8

### PRAYERS FOR SUCCESS AGAINST ENEMIES

#### *A psalm of David.*

Here,

**I.** David acknowledges his dependence upon God and his obligations to him, v. 1, 2. A prayer for further mercy is fitly begun with a thanksgiving for former mercy; and when we are waiting upon God to bless us we should stir up ourselves to bless him. He gives to God the glory of two things: —

**1.** What he was to him: *Blessed be the Lord my rock* (v. 1), *my goodness, my fortress*, v. 2. He has in the covenant engaged himself to be so, and encouraged us, accordingly, to depend upon him; all the saints, who by faith have made him theirs, have found him not only to answer but to outdo their expectations. David speaks of it here as the matter of his trust, and that which made him easy, as the matter of his triumph, and that which made him glad, and in which he gloried. See how he multiplies words to express the satisfaction he had in God and his interest in him.

**(1.)** “He is *my strength*, on whom I stay, and from whom I have power both for my work and for my warfare, *my rock* to build on, to take shelter in.” Even when we are weak we may *be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*.

**(2.)** “*My goodness*, not only good to me, but my chief good, in whose favour I place my felicity, and who is the author of all the goodness that is in me, and *from whom comes every good and perfect gift*.”

**(3.)** “*My fortress, and my high tower*, in whom I think myself as safe as ever any prince thought himself in a castle or strong-hold.” David had formerly sheltered himself in strong-holds at En-gedi (<sup>1029</sup>1 Samuel 23:29), which perhaps were natural fastnesses. He had lately made himself master of the strong-hold of Zion, which was fortified by art, and he *dwelt in the fort* (<sup>1030</sup>2 Samuel 5:7, 9), but he depends not on these. “Lord,” says he, “thou art *my fortress and my high tower*.” The divine attributes and promises are fortifications to a believer, far exceeding those either of nature or art.

**(4.)** *My deliverer*, and, as it is in the original, very emphatically, *my deliverer to me*, “not only a deliverer I have interest in, but who is always nigh unto me and makes all my deliverances turn to my real benefit.”

**(5.)** “*My shield*, to guard me against all the malignant darts that my enemies let fly at me, not only *my fortress* at home, but *my shield* abroad in the field of battle.” Wherever a believer goes he carries his protection along with him. *Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield*.

**2.** What he had done for him. He was bred a shepherd, and seems not to have been designed by his parents, or himself for any thing more. But,

**(1.)** God had made him a soldier. His hands had been used to the crook and his fingers to the harp, but God *taught his hands to war and his*

*fingers to fight*, because he designed him for Israel's champion; and what God calls men to he either finds them or makes them fit for. Let the men of war give God the glory of all their military skill; the same that teaches the meanest husbandman his art teaches the greatest general his. It is a pity that any whose fingers God has taught to fight should fight against him or his kingdom among men. Those have special reason to acknowledge God with thankfulness who prove to be qualified for services which they themselves never thought of.

(2.) God had made him a sovereign prince, had taught him to wield the sceptre as well as the sword, to rule as well as fight, the harder and nobler art of the two: He *subdueth my people under me*. The providence of God is to be acknowledged in making people subject to their prince, and so preserving the order and benefit of societies. There was a special hand of God inclining the people of Israel to be subject to David, pursuant to the promise God had made him; and it was typical of that great act of divine grace, the bringing of souls into subjection to the Lord Jesus and making them willing in the day of his power.

II. He admires God's condescension to man and to himself in particular (v. 3, 4): "*Lord, what is man, what a poor little thing is he, that thou takest knowledge of him, that thou makest account of him, that he falls so much under thy cognizance and care, and that thou hast such a tender regard to any of that mean and worthless race as thou hast had to me!*" Considering the many disgraces which the human nature lies under, we have reason to admire the honours God has put upon mankind in general (the saints especially, some in a particular manner, as David) and upon the Messiah (to whom those words are applied, <sup><BIB></sup>Hebrews 2:6), who was *highly exalted because he humbled himself to be found in fashion as a man*, and *has authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of man*. A question to this purport David asked (<sup><BIB></sup>Psalm 8:4), and he illustrated the wonder by the consideration of the great dignity God has placed man in (<sup><BIB></sup>Psalm 8:5), *Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour*. Here he illustrates it by the consideration of the meanness and mortality of man, notwithstanding the dignity put upon him (v. 4): *Man is like to vanity; so frail is he, so weak, so helpless, compassed about with so many infirmities, and his continuance here so very short and uncertain, that he is as like as may be to vanity itself. Nay, he is vanity, he is so at his best estate. His days have little substance in them, considering how many of the thoughts and cares of an immortal soul are employed about a poor*

dying body; they *are as a shadow*, dark and flitting, transitory and finishing with the sun, and, when that sets, resolving itself into all shadow. They *are as a shadow that passeth away*, and there is no loss of it. David puts himself into the number of those that are thus mean and despicable.

**III.** He begs of God to strengthen him and give him success against the enemies that invaded him, v. 5-8. He does not specify who they were that he was in fear of, but says, *Scatter them, destroy them*. God knew whom he meant, though he did not name them. But afterwards he describes them (v. 7, 8): “They are *strange children*, Philistines, aliens, bad neighbours to Israel, heathens, whom we are bound to be strange to and not to make any leagues with, and who therefore carry it strangely towards us.” Notwithstanding the advantages with which God had blessed David's arms against them, they were still vexatious and treacherous, and men that one could put no confidence in: “One cannot take their word, for their *mouth speaketh vanity*; nay, if they give their hand upon it, or offer their hand to help you, there is no trusting them; for *their right hand is a right hand of falsehood*.” Against such as these we cannot defend ourselves, but we may depend on the God of truth and justice, who hates falsehood, to defend us from them.

- 1.** David prays that God would appear, that he would do something extraordinary, for the conviction of those who preferred their dunghill-deities before the God of Israel (v. 5): “*Bow thy heavens, O Lord!* and make it evident that they are indeed thine, and that thou art the Lord of them, ~~and~~ Isaiah 66:1. Let thy providence threaten my enemies, and look black upon them, as the clouds do on the earth when they are thick, and hang very low, big with a storm. Fight against those that fight against us, so that it may visibly appear that thou art for us. *Touch the mountains*, our strong and stately enemies, *and let them smoke*. Show thyself by the ministry of thy angels, as thou didst upon Mount Sinai.”
- 2.** That he would appear against his enemies, that he would fight from heaven against them, as sometimes he had done, by lightnings, which are his arrows (his fiery darts, against which the hardest steel is no armour of proof, so penetrating is the force of lightning), that he himself would shoot these arrows, who, we are sure, never misses his mark, but hits where he aims.
- 3.** That he would appear for him, v. 7. He begs for their destruction, in order to his own deliverance and the repose of his people: “*Send thy hand,*

thy power, *from above*, for that way we look for help; *rid me and deliver me out of these great waters* that are ready to overflow me.” God's time to help his people is when they are sinking and all other helps fail.

## PSALM 144:9-15

### NATIONAL HAPPINESS DESIRED

The method is the same in this latter part of the psalm as in the former; David first gives glory to God and then begs mercy from him.

**I.** He praises God for the experiences he had had of his goodness to him and the encouragements he had to expect further mercy from him, v. 9, 10. In the midst of his complaints concerning the power and treachery of his enemies, here is a holy exultation in his God: *I will sing a new song to thee, O God!* a song of praise for new mercies, for those compassions that are new every morning. Fresh favours call for fresh returns of thanks; nay, we must praise God for the mercies we hope for by his promise as well as those we have received by his providence, ~~2~~2 Chronicles 20:20, 21. He will join music with his songs of praise, to express and excite his holy joy in God; he will praise God *upon a psaltery of ten strings*, in the best manner, thinking all little enough to set forth the praises of God. He tells us what this new song shall be (v. 10): *It is he that giveth salvation unto kings*. This intimates,

**1.** That great kings cannot save themselves without him. Kings have their life-guards, and have armies at command, and all the means of safety that can be devised; but, after all, it is God that gives them their salvation, and secures them by those means, which he could do, if there were occasion, without them, ~~16~~Psalm 33:16. Kings are the protectors of their people, but it is God that is their protector. How much service do they owe him then with their power who gives them all their salvations!

**2.** That good kings, who are his ministers for the good of their subjects, shall be protected and saved by him. He has engaged to give salvation to those kings that are his subjects and rule for him; witness the great things he had done for *David his servant*, whom he had many a time *delivered from the hurtful sword*, to which Saul's malice, and his own zeal for the service of his country, had often exposed him. This may refer to Christ the

Son of David, and then it is a new song indeed, a New-Testament song. God delivered him from the hurtful sword, upheld him as his servant, and brought him off a conqueror over all the powers of darkness, <sup>(241)</sup>Isaiah 42:1; 49:8. To him he gave salvation, not for himself only, but for us, raising him up to be *a horn of salvation*.

**II.** He prays for the continuance of God's favour.

**1.** That he might be delivered from the public enemies, v. 11. Here he repeats his prayer and plea, v. 7, 8. His persecutors were still of the same character, false and perfidious, and who would certainly over-reach an honest man and be too hard for him: "Therefore, Lord, do thou *deliver me from them*, for they are a strange sort of people."

**2.** That he might see the public peace and prosperity: "Lord, let us have victory, that we may have quietness, which we shall never have while our enemies have it in their power to do us mischief." David, as a king, here expresses the earnest desire he had of the welfare of his people, wherein he was a type of Christ, who provides effectually for the good of his chosen. We have here,

**(1.)** The particular instances of that public prosperity which David desired for his people.

[1.] A hopeful progeny (v. 12): "*That our sons and our daughters may be in all respects such as we could wish.*" He means not those only of his own family, but those of his subjects, that are the seed of the next generation. It adds much to the comfort and happiness of parents in this world to see their children promising and likely to do well. *First*, It is pleasant to see *our sons as plants grown up in their youth*, as olive-plants (Psalm 128:), the *planting of the Lord* (<sup>(242)</sup>Isaiah 61:3), — to see them as plants, not as weeds, not as thorns, — to see them as plants growing great, not withered and blasted, — to see them of a healthful constitution, a quick capacity, a towardly disposition, and especially of a pious inclination, likely to bring forth fruit unto God in their day, — to see them *in their youth*, their growing time, increasing in every thing that is good, growing wiser and better, till they grow strong in spirit. *Secondly*, It is no less desirable to see *our daughters as corner-stones*, or corner-pillars, *polished after the similitude of a palace*, or temple. By daughters families are united and connected, to their mutual strength, as the parts of a building are by the corner-stones; and when they are graceful and beautiful both in body and

mind they are then polished after the similitude of a nice and curious structure. When we see our daughters well-established and stayed with wisdom and discretion, as corner-stones are fastened in the building, — when we see them by faith united to Christ, as the chief corner-stone, adorned with the graces of God's Spirit, which are the polishing of that which is naturally rough, and *become women professing godliness*, — when we see them purified and consecrated to God as living temples, we think ourselves happy in them.

[2.] Great plenty. Numerous families increase the care, perhaps more than the comfort, where there is not sufficient for their maintenance; and therefore he prays for a growing estate with a growing family. *First*, That their store-houses might be well-replenished with the fruits and products of the earth: *That our garners may be full*, like those of the good householder, who brings out of them things new and old (those things that are best new he has in that state, those that are best when they are kept he has in that state), — that we may have in them *all manner of stores*, for ourselves and our friends, — that, living plentifully, we may live not luxuriously, for then we abuse our plenty, but cheerfully and usefully, — that, having abundance, we may be thankful to God, generous to our friends, and charitable to the poor; otherwise, what profit is it to have our garners full? <sup>(508B)</sup>James 5:3. *Secondly*, That their flocks might greatly increase: *That our sheep may bring forth thousands, and ten thousands, in our folds*. Much of the wealth of their country consisted in their flocks (<sup>(377B)</sup>Proverbs 27:26), and this is the case with ours too, else wool would not be, as it is, a staple commodity. The increase of our cattle is a blessing in which God is to be acknowledged. *Thirdly*, That their beasts designed for service might be fit for it: *That our oxen may be strong to labour in the plough, that they may be fat and fleshy* (so some), in good working case. We were none of us made to be idle, and therefore we should pray for bodily health, not that we may be easy and take our pleasures, but that we *may be strong to labour*, that we may do the work of our place and day, else we are worse than the beasts; for when they are strong it is for labour.

[3.] An uninterrupted peace. *First*, That there be no war, *no breaking in* of invaders, *no going out* of deserters. “Let not our enemies break in upon us; let us not have occasion to march out against them.” War brings with it abundance of mischiefs, whether it be offensive or defensive. *Secondly*, That there be no oppression nor faction — *no complaining in our streets*, that the people may have no cause to complain either of their government

or of one another, nor may be so peevish as to complain without cause. It is desirable thus to dwell in quiet habitations.

(2.) His reflection upon this description of the prosperity of the nation, which he so much desired (v. 15): *Happy are the people that are in such a case* (but it is seldom so, and never long so), *yea, happy are the people whose God is the Lord*. The relation of a people to God as theirs is here spoken of either,

[1.] As that which is the fountain whence all those blessings flow. Happy are the Israelites if they faithfully adhere to the Lord as their God, for they may expect to be *in such a case*. National piety commonly brings national prosperity; for nations as such, in their national capacity, are capable of rewards and punishments only in this life. Or,

[2.] As that which is abundantly preferable to all these enjoyments. The psalmist began to say, as most do, *Happy are the people that are in such a case*; those are blessed that prosper in the world. But he immediately corrects himself: *Yea, rather, happy are the people whose God is the Lord*, who have his favour, and love, and grace, according to the tenour of the covenant, though they have not abundance of this world's goods. As all this, and much more, cannot make us happy, unless the Lord be our God, so, if he be, the want of this, the loss of this, nay, the reverse of this, cannot make us miserable.