



## Psalm 144 - Prayer for National Deliverance and Security

Of David.

### Introduction

This royal psalm asks for God to give victory to the reigning heir of David, which will lead to a condition of blessing for his people. It was written from the time when David came to be recognised as the king over all the tribes of Israel, and expresses his heart for the nation in both war and peace.

The 'I' in vv.1-11 is the Davidic king, and 'our' in vv.12-14 is the whole people. God's promise to the house of David recorded in 2 Samuel 7:4-17 has tied the well-being of the whole people to the faithfulness of the reigning heir of David. When God's faithful people sing this, they are praying for the success of this arrangement, so that the people might flourish under God's blessing. Christians, who recognise Jesus as the final heir of David, pray that God will protect his people from persecutors, will further the expansion of the people, and will prosper the faithful in their daily lives.

### Psalm 144:1-2 - The Lord Prospers the King in His Warfare.

With echoes of Psalm 18, this psalm begins by reviewing how God has equipped the king to fight for the sake of the people. As the leader of God's people (like Psalms 20-21), the singer has found the Lord to be his stronghold and deliverer, who in his blessing subdues peoples under the king.

- <sup>1</sup> Blessed be the Lord, my rock,  
who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;
- <sup>2</sup> my rock and my fortress,  
my stronghold and my deliverer,

my shield, in whom I take refuge,  
who subdues the peoples under me.

### Psalm 144:1-2

Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war. David was a remarkable warrior, who in today's terms would be an elite special forces soldier. David killed many men in hand-to-hand combat, such as in 1 Samuel 17:48-50 and 18:26-27. Training is an essential part of success as a soldier, and David understood that it was the Lord who had trained his hands for war using a sword, battle-axe, or spear, and his fingers for battle using a bow and arrows or a sling.

If a man or woman feels that God is training them to use spiritual weapons - such as the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God - then their training must always continue. It is never, "who trained my hands for war," but always in the present: who trains my hands for war. Spurgeon wrote of the danger of using some weapons without adequate training - a danger in both the natural and spiritual realms: "Untrained force is often an injury to the man who possesses it, and it even becomes a danger to those who are round about him; and therefore the psalmist blesses the Lord as much for teaching as for strength."

My rock and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer. David poured out names and titles for God, each representing some aspect of God's character or help that had been of use in battle. David knew God's help and presence in many ways, not just one or a few.

My rock is the Hebrew word *hesed* and therefore the meaning is more like 'my hope of steadfast love'; the same phrase is used in Jonah 2:8b, where 'hope of steadfast love' is translated <<*forsake their true loyalty*>>.

Who subdues the peoples under me. David likely wrote this after he was received as king over all the tribes of Israel; refer to 2 Samuel 5:1-5. If this psalm comes from an earlier period, he may mean the subduing of the mighty men under his authority, as in 1 Samuel 22:1-2. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Men who rule others should thank God if they succeed in the task. Such strange creatures are human beings, that if a number of them are kept in peaceful association under the leadership of any one of the Lord's servants, he is bound to bless God every day for the wonderful fact."

The peoples, Hebrew '*ammim*', could be 'my people' (Hebrew '*ammi*'). Although this latter reading has more textual support, the many parallels with Psalm 18, especially: <<*the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me*>> (Psalm 18:47) support the former text.

### Psalm 144:3-4 - How Can You Take Notice of Mankind?

The king does not take God's help for granted. He knows that if God should regard him, it is condescension: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*>> (Psalm 8:4); he, and the people he serves, are like a breath: <<*You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath*>> (Psalm 39:5), their lives quickly pass by.

<sup>3</sup> O Lord, what are human beings that you regard them,  
or mortals that you think of them?

<sup>4</sup> They are like a breath;  
their days are like a passing shadow.

### Psalm 144:3-4

O Lord, what are human beings that you regard them. In the previous lines David exalted God's great strength and victory. In light of that, it amazed David that God would have interest in him, or in humanity in general. Psalm 8:4 asks the same question from a slightly different perspective. Here the emphasis is on the Lord as a warrior that none can oppose. In Psalm 8:4 the emphasis is on the power of God as creator and sustainer of the universe. Spurgeon commented, "The Lord thinks much of man, and in connection with redeeming love makes a great figure of him: this can be believed, but it cannot be explained."

Or mortals that you think of them? David used the common method of repetition to bring emphasis to the idea of God's unusual and even unexpected care for humanity.

They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow. Having been responsible for the death of so many men, and having been so near to death himself, David knew how temporary human life was. It was as fleeting as a breath or a passing shadow: <<*For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope*>> (1 Chronicles 29:15), <<*A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last*>> (Job 14:1-2), and: <<*Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*>> (James 4:14).

### Psalm 144:5-8 - Come Down and Rescue Me from the Foreigners!

After the review of God's faithfulness and condescension, the psalm moves on to request: rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners. These words

suggest that the psalm is especially suited to a time when the king must again lead the people in war, when Gentiles would conquer and oppress them. It was not true of all Gentiles that their mouths speak lies, and those who lead God's people in worship must be careful to guard against mere nationalism.

- <sup>5</sup> Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down;  
touch the mountains so that they smoke.
- <sup>6</sup> Make the lightning flash and scatter them;  
send out your arrows and rout them.
- <sup>7</sup> Stretch out your hand from on high;  
set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters,  
from the hand of aliens,
- <sup>8</sup> whose mouths speak lies,  
and whose right hands are false.

#### Psalm 144:5-8

Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down. David used phrases and images from God's descent upon Mount Sinai recorded in Exodus 19:16-20 to give the sense of awe and even terror connected with God's presence.

Set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters. David asked that the same God of majestic awe would fight for him, sending forth lightning like arrows against the aliens who fought against David with lies and falsehood. During David's days as a fugitive from Saul, he had many men who lied about him, saying the worst things about David so they might gain favour with King Saul: *<<And he added, 'Why does my lord pursue his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is mortals, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out today from my share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, "Go, serve other gods">>* (1 Samuel 26:18-19). David also likely faced whisperers and liars against his character when he was king. Like the greater Son of David, he was often lied about and against. When David spoke against these foreigners, it was not because of their nationality. By their actions they proved that they were truly foreigners from the people of God and rejected Yahweh, the God of Israel. Spurgeon remarked, "Those against whom he pleaded were out of covenant with God; they were Philistines and Edomites; or else they were men of his own nation of black heart and traitorous spirit, who were real strangers, though they bore the name of Israel!"

### Psalm 144:9-11 - Rescue Me, That I May Sing Your Praises.

The song looks to the future: once God has given the deliverance of vv.5-8, the king, David God's servant, will lead the people in public thanks with a new song on the ten-stringed harp. Verse 11 repeats the request of vv.7b-8.

<sup>9</sup> I will sing a new song to you, O God;  
upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,  
<sup>10</sup> the one who gives victory to kings,  
who rescues his servant David.

### Psalm 144:9-10

I will sing a new song to you, O God. New victories and new deliverance required a new song. God's love and work to David was often fresh and new, so his praise would also be.

The concept of singing a new song to the Lord is not so much a song with different lyrics and music but a change of heart that accepts God as the one true God and brings praise to his name. The call for a new song in Scripture also appears in Psalm 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, and 149:1, Isaiah 42:10, and Revelation 5:9 and 14:3.

Upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you. David was a skilled musician: <<*One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him'*>> (1 Samuel 16:18), and he played his harp of ten strings as he sang praises to God.

The one who gives victory to kings. David had felt God's help many times as a humble shepherd boy: <<*But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God'*>> (1 Samuel 17:34-36), and as a despised fugitive: <<*So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. Saul and his men went to search for him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men*>>

*to capture them. Then a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come; for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.' So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. David then went up from there, and lived in the strongholds of Engedi>> (1 Samuel 23:24-29). This gives the sense that David was almost surprised that God would also help him as king, rescuing him from the cruel sword (v.11). The word rendered victory can also be translated 'salvation' as in: <<**May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners. May the Lord fulfil all your petitions**>> (Psalm 20:5): the requested victory furthers God's purpose for his people, and thus the king is not allowed to pursue selfish ends with the people's wars; refer to the comment made on 20:1-5.*

<sup>11</sup> Rescue me from the cruel sword,  
and deliver me from the hand of aliens,  
whose mouths speak lies,  
and whose right hands are false.

#### Psalm 144:11

Rescue me from the cruel sword, and deliver me from the hand of aliens. David here repeated the idea from earlier in the psalm (vv.7-8). The presence and destructive work of these foreign liars and false speakers was of great concern to him, pleading with God to rescue him.

#### Psalm 144:12-15 - May Your People Know Your Blessing.

The closing section shows the purpose of the fight, namely, to protect God's people so that they can flourish under God's blessing. The people ask for healthy children and productive farms as promised by God in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. They recognise that such blessings are a pure privilege and God's generous gift. Israel is the people whose God is the Lord, who are to bring blessedness to the rest of the world: <<**Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage**>> (Psalm 33:12), <<**It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth**>> (Isaiah 49:6), which many see as a messianic prophecy.

<sup>12</sup> May our sons in their youth  
be like plants full grown,  
our daughters like corner pillars,  
cut for the building of a palace.

- 13 May our barns be filled  
with produce of every kind;  
may our sheep increase by thousands,  
by tens of thousands in our fields,
- 14 and may our cattle be heavy with young.  
May there be no breach in the walls, no exile,  
and no cry of distress in our streets.
- 15 Happy are the people to whom such blessings fall;  
happy are the people whose God is the Lord.

### Psalm 144:12-15

May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown. David prayed for a series of blessings that would come among God's people when God dealt with the evil speakers in their midst. The list of blessings focuses on the concerns of everyday people in farming societies:

- Blessed children in the home; well-rooted and flourishing sons, and stable and stately daughters. Derek Kidner remarked, "The daughters are the very picture of statuesque elegance and strength, 'like sculptured pillars at the corners of a palace' (NEB). There has been nothing slipshod in their upbringing. Spurgeon added, "We desire a blessing for our whole family, daughters as well as sons. For the girls to be left out of the circle of blessing would be unhappy indeed."
- Blessed in the work of their hands, with barns full, tens of thousands of sheep, and fruitful cattle.
- Blessed with safety and peace in the community, with no violence, i.e. no breach in the walls, or riot over injustice, that is, no cry of distress in our streets. Adam Clarke commented, "So well ordered is the police of the kingdom, that there are no depredations, no robbers, house-breakers, or marauding parties, in the land; no sudden incursions of neighbouring tribes or banditti breaking into fields or houses, carrying away property, and taking with them the people to sell them into captivity: there is no such breaking in, and no such going out, in the nation."

Happy are the people to whom such blessings fall. David prayed as a wise and caring king, asking God for blessing upon his people in the common, everyday lives. Spurgeon commented, "These verses may with a little accommodation be applied to a prosperous church, where the converts are growing and beautiful, the gospel stores abundant, and the spiritual increase most cheering. There ministers and

workers are in full vigour, and the people are happy and united. The Lord make it so in all our churches evermore.”

**Happy are the people whose God is the Lord.** Yet such blessings could only come to God’s covenant people as they were loyal to God as they had promised to be loyal in Exodus 23:3-8. When they looked to Yahweh as their only God and Lord, rejecting all the idols of the nations, then the promised blessings were granted - and God’s people were happy. Spurgeon observed, “Those who worship the happy God become a happy people.” And Kidner concluded, “The prayer ends at the source of the harmony it has visualised. For while it treasures the gifts, it reserves its final beatitude for the relationship behind them: that of being the people who know the Lord as their own.”

**Happy** or, more commonly, **blessed** translates the Hebrew word *esher* meaning also contentment. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favour and blessing. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matthew 5:3-11; as confirmed by: <<***Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him***>> (James 1:12). The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word beatitude.