



Psalm 64 - Prayer for Protection from Enemies

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

Introduction

This psalm shares many themes with Psalm 63, namely, confidence in God's victory over those who bring troubles on the righteous. However, since the psalm begins with a request, it is best to see it as an individual lament. The psalm has two parts: a request for help against deadly schemes (vv.1-6), and confident expectation that God will fight on behalf of his faithful (vv.7-10). The psalm presents God's purpose for his victory as instruction for mankind (v.9) and the bringing of joy to the godly (v.10).

Psalm 64:1-6 - Hide Me from the Secret Plans of the Wicked

This psalm lays out the danger to the devoted believer with three requests ('hear my voice', 'preserve my life', and 'hide me'), and an extensive description of the enemies and their malevolent schemes. As usual in these psalms of lament, the enemy is made up of wicked people (v.2) who have an evil purpose (v.5) to carry out injustice (v.6) against the faithful, i.e. the blameless of v.4. The particular strategy is to use bitter words (vv.3-4), which form snares secretly (v.5); these terms are vague enough to range from lies that sow discord or despair to slander that destroys reputations. This breadth of possibilities is probably intentional, allowing the psalm to be relevant to a variety of situations.

- 1 Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint;
preserve my life from the dread enemy.
- 2 Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the scheming of evildoers,
- 3 who whet their tongues like swords,

who aim bitter words like arrows,
4 shooting from ambush at the blameless;
they shoot suddenly and without fear.

Psalm 64:1-4

Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint. Complaint is also translated as meditation making this an interesting turn of phrase. Either David meant that his complaint was vocal so that God could hear his voice, or that God would hear the silent expression of his heart as his voice. Either way, as with many times in the psalms, David cried out to God for help: <<*I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him*>> (Psalm 142:2).

Preserve my life from the dread enemy. The word dread is commonly translated fear and speaks of something greater than the normal fear of battle. David knew how crippling this kind of fear could be and prayed to be kept from it.

Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked. David knew there were dangerous enemies plotting his destruction. He felt powerless to make them stop, so he prayed. The NIV gives a good sense of this in translating <<*Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked*>>.

Who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows. The secret plots against David consisted in words and lies against him, all pushing towards his destruction and death. This was not a case of mere words not hurting; this was an active conspiracy to kill.

They shoot suddenly and without fear. David knew that his enemies fired their bitter words as arrows against him, and when they did it did not bother them in the least. They did not fear either David or God. Psalm 64 emphasises the devious nature of David's enemies. They use secret plots. They shoot in secret. They attack suddenly. Especially because David mentioned an attack by arrows from a hidden or secret position, his enemies acted like the ancient version of snipers: <<*They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding-places they murder the innocent*>> (Psalm 10:8a), and: <<*for look, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart*>> (Psalm 11:2).

David knew how dangerous it was in battle if there was a hidden archer working as a sniper. If he could see and confront his enemy one to one, a warrior such as David liked his chances. The hidden sniper was of great concern, to be put down by an arrow one never saw coming. David's enemies did not use literal arrows, but they attacked him secretly, anonymously, without the courage to say things to his face. They shot at him like a sniper shoots at a person who has no way to defend his or herself.

- 5 They hold fast to their evil purpose;
they talk of laying snares secretly,
thinking, 'Who can see us?
- 6 Who can search out our crimes?
We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot.'
For the human heart and mind are deep.

Psalm 64:5-6

They hold fast to their evil purpose. It would be bad enough that an individual purposed this against David, but it was worse than that. Many people had conspired against him, planning secret traps and snares, unafraid before God or man, i.e. Who can see us? Who can search out our crimes? They ask a similar question posed by Eliphaz: <<*Therefore you say, "What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness?"*>> (Job 22:13).

We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot. They were proud in their evil plotting. They boasted of their sins, showing the dark depth of their mind and heart.

Psalm 64:7-10 - God Makes an Example of the Wicked

Those who would shoot their bitter words like arrows aimed at the innocent will find that God shoots his arrow at them (v.7). This is keeping the imagery of the first section; it refers to God bringing them down as they deserve, with their own tongues turned against them, which is also a phrase vague enough to cover a wide range of possibilities; this is because the focus is more on confidence in their failure, whatever their schemes may have been.

By their lies, the evildoers are brought to ruin of an unnamed sort. Whatever their ruin may be, its effect brings a benefit: <<*all who see them will shake with horror*>> (v.8), an expression of astonishment, perhaps even of compassion), as confirmed in: <<*But my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway, making their land a horror, a thing to be hissed at for ever. All who pass by it are horrified and shake their heads*>> (Jeremiah 18:15-16), and: <<*Israel was a laughing-stock for you, though he was not caught among thieves; but whenever you spoke of him you shook your head!*>> (Jeremiah 48:27); all mankind fears (v.9), and they ponder what God has done, taking instruction from God's vindication: <<*People will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth'*>> (Psalm 58:11). In view of this, let the righteous, i.e. the faithful covenant member, rejoice in the Lord (v.10).

- 7 But God will shoot his arrow at them;
they will be wounded suddenly.
- 8 Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin;
all who see them will shake with horror.
- 9 Then everyone will fear;
they will tell what God has brought about,
and ponder what he has done.

Psalm 64:7-9

But God will shoot his arrow at them. The evil men opposing David acted as if they had all the arrows, but David knew that God was his defence, and was well armed. God had an arrow of his own, and they will be wounded suddenly. David's enemies shot at him like snipers, from hidden and high positions. David's friend was God, in a higher and more hidden position. They shot their poisonous words at David unexpectedly, without warning. God would shoot back at them unexpectedly, without warning, i.e. suddenly. God had them in his sights.

They will be wounded suddenly is a reminder that often the judgement of God comes upon the wicked unexpectedly, without any warning. They think everything is fine until they are wounded.

Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin. They used their lies and slanders to attack David, but God would find a way to make their own words their ruin. They would trip in the very way they hoped to trap David.

Then everyone will fear; they will tell what God has brought about. David was confident that God would use his dealings against these wicked men as a lesson to others. When they saw the evil plotters wounded by God, they would learn: <<*After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you'*>> (1 Corinthians 14:25). Previously the wicked asked, <<*Who can see us?*>> (v.5). The answer is, everyone will see them, because God will use them to teach a lesson to everyone.

- 10 Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord
and take refuge in him.
Let all the upright in heart glory.

Psalm 64:10

Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord. God's dealing with the wicked would be a lesson to all men, but it would be special joy to the righteous. They had special reason to be glad that God was vindicated and his servant was protected.

And take refuge in him. It would not only bring joy, but also increase faith. God's faithful answer to prayer would demonstrate that he is worthy of trust, and build the faith of the righteous: <<***O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you***>> (Psalm 25:20).