

**“Deliver Me, O My God”
(An Exposition of Psalm 59)¹**

Introduction

This is a Psalm of David which, as the title or superscription tells us, was written regarding the time **“when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.”** This is spoken of in 1 Samuel 19:11-17, which says,

“Saul sent messengers to David’s house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David’s wife, told him, “If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.” So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats’ hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, “He is sick.” Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, “Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him.” And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats’ hair at its head. Saul said to Michal, “Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?” And Michal answered Saul, “He said to me, ‘Let me go. Why should I kill you?’”

Saul had sent men to watch David, in order to make sure that he did not escape from his evil grasp, for he intended to kill him. But David’s wife, Michal (who was the daughter of Saul!) warned David that if he did not flee that very night, Saul would kill him in the morning. She let David down through the window, and even tricked David’s pursuers by setting up an effigy of David in the bed in order to buy David more time to escape.

David’s Prayer for Deliverance

David narrowly escaped death at the hands of Saul once again. But to whom did David give credit for his deliverance? Michal, his wife? No, certainly not primarily. No, David looked to *his God* for deliverance and salvation! In v.1-4 he writes,

**“Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
protect me from those who rise up against me;
deliver me from those who work evil,
and save me from bloodthirsty men.
For behold, they lie in wait for my life;
fierce men stir up strife against me.
For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD,
for no fault of mine, they run and make ready.
Awake, come to meet me, and see!”**

Look at how he strings words together in praying for deliverance from his enemies. *Twice* he prays for his God to **“deliver”** him from them (v.1, 2). He asks God to **“protect”** him (or *lift him up* to safety) in v.1, and then again to **“save”** him from them in v.2.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

These “**bloodthirsty**” (v.2) enemies were lying in wait for him to kill him (v.3). “**Fierce**” men were stirring up strife against him. There was no escape, nowhere to go. And so David prayed. For as great as his enemies (“**my enemies**” – v.1) were, they were no match for his God (“**my God**” – v.1).

Let that serve as example & instruction for the godly whenever they suffer persecution, that although we may be tempted to fear and despair whenever we consider our enemies (who are most often greater than us), that they will be seen in proper perspective when they are viewed in light of our God (who is infinitely greater than they are). *As always, the fear of God drives out the fear of man.*

Notice that David implores God at least partially on the basis of his own innocence. In v.3-4 he says that his enemies were doing all of these things against him “**For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD, for no fault of mine.**”

Now he is certainly *not* claiming to be sinless before God. Far from it! David well knew that he himself was a sinner and that his salvation was entirely due to the grace or “**steadfast love**” of his God – something he mentions no less than *three* (3) times in this brief Psalm (v.10, 16, 17). No, what David is saying here is that his hands were clean from transgressions against his enemies. He had not done anything to bring their malice and violence upon himself. Matthew Henry writes,

“Though our innocency [sic] will not secure us from troubles, yet it will greatly support and comfort us under our troubles. The testimony of our conscience for us that we have behaved ourselves well toward those that behave themselves ill towards us will be very much our rejoicing in the day of evil.”²

A clear conscience will serve to give God’s people great confidence in prayer, even in the worst of times. Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:8 that “**in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.**”

Unclean hands, however, are certainly an impediment to our prayers. In Isaiah 1:15-17 the Lord says,

“*When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.*
**Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow’s cause.**”

Holy hands are hands that can be spread out in prayer to God with confidence in His gracious willingness to answer. But *hypocrisy* is the surest way to having God hide His eyes from our prayers, and ensuring that even if we make many prayers, He will not listen.

² Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol.III, p.456

David's Description of His Enemies

Notice that once again we see here in this Psalm that some of the worst persecutions that the saints endure are often the result of malicious *words* spoken by those who work evil. For this reason David goes on to liken his enemies to “**dogs**” who went about the city streets “**howling**” (v.6) and “**bellowing with their mouths with swords in their lips**” (v.7). David repeats that same refrain nearly word for word in v.14-15, where he writes,

**“Each evening they come back,
howling like dogs
and prowling about the city.
They wander about for food
and growl if they do not get their fill.”**

To be compared to “**dogs**” was no compliment. He has in mind *not* so much the family dog, so much as the wild dogs that roamed the streets at night. They were dangerous, violent, and voracious.

Add to that the fact that David in verses 5 and 8 refers to his enemies as “**all the nations**” and asks God to *punish* them (v.5) and *hold them in derision* (v.8). Why “**the nations**”? The Hebrew word there is *goyim*, which has the idea of Gentile or pagan foreign nations, those who were strangers to God and were unclean.

Now when you consider that David’s persecutors here in this Psalm were at least primarily those from *within* the people of Israel (such as Saul), this may strike you as odd. But what is he really saying about them here? He is speaking of them as if they were not members of Israel and the covenant people of God at all. They may have been Jews *outwardly*, but inwardly & spiritually they were strangers to God. As Paul says in Romans 9:6-7,

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.””

One need look no farther than the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus’s day, even the very members of the Sanhedrin, who conspired together to murder the Lord of glory. These were Jews by birth, but they were *not* born again, and were *not* true children of Abraham according to the promise.

In v.8-10 David doesn’t just pray for deliverance, but also confesses his faith and confidence in God:

**“But you, O LORD, laugh at them;
you hold all the nations in derision.
O my Strength, I will watch for you,
for you, O God, are my fortress.
My God in his steadfast love will meet me;
God will let me look in triumph on my enemies.”**

David’s home may have been for a time turned into a *trap* that seemed to offer no shelter and no hope of escape, but he yet hid himself in his God, who was his true *fortress*. And he purposed to wait for God, who was his *strength* (v.9). He trusted in the “**steadfast love**” of God toward him, and His faithfulness in protecting him in his time of distress.

David's Prayer of Imprecation

Here in this Psalm we find another *prayer of imprecation* against his enemies. It is a prayer for God to judge the wicked, especially the enemies of His people, those who persecute His church. These kinds of prayers can have a tendency to make some sincere believers uncomfortable. Some even go so far as to claim that such prayers do not belong on the lips of God's people in the New Testament age.

But such prayers are not just often found in the Psalms, but also in the New Testament as well. Revelation 6:9-11 says,

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”

Not only that, but in 2 Timothy 4:14–15 the Apostle Paul writes,

“Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; *the Lord will repay him according to his deeds*. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.”

The King James Version renders this more clearly as a prayer or request: **“the Lord reward him according to his works.”**

Now David is not here praying selfishly or vengefully. Rather his chief purpose in his imprecations against his enemies, was *the glory of God's name!* In v.11-13 he writes,

**“Kill them not, lest my people forget;
make them totter by your power and bring them down,
O Lord, our shield!
For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.
For the cursing and lies that they utter,
consume them in wrath;
consume them till they are no more,
*that they may know that God rules over Jacob
to the ends of the earth. Selah*”**

Look again at what David says there in v.13. He even goes so far as to pray that God would “consume” his enemies in His “wrath.” But the purpose was **“that they may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth.”** He wanted the wicked to learn and know without a doubt that **“God rules over Jacob.”** Indeed He does so **“to the ends of the earth.”**

When the wicked seem to go on and on unchecked, unpunished, seemingly sinning and persecuting God's people with impunity, the people begin to imagine that God does not really rule, and worse yet that He does not watch over His people. But God *does* rule, and He watches over His people to gather and defend them.

As Paul says in Ephesians 1:22-23,

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

The crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ is now reigning over all things from the right hand of God, and He has been given **“as head over all things to the church”** (v.22). In other words, He rules over all things *for the benefit of His church - for our good!*

David's Praise for the God of His Salvation

No wonder David ends this great Psalm with *praise!* In v.16-17 he writes,

**“But I will sing of your strength;
I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning.
For you have been to me a fortress
and a refuge in the day of my distress.
O my Strength, I will sing praises to you,
for you, O God, are my fortress,
the God who shows me steadfast love.”**

The dogs may *howl* and *prowl* and *growl* (v.14-15) all night, *but the saints will sing!* We still have abundant cause for praise, even in time of trouble.

We can sing of God's strength, and of His **“steadfast love.”** For God has been our fortress and our refuge in the day of our distress. He Himself is our strength, our fortress, and is our God who shows us steadfast love in Jesus Christ. **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** (Romans 8:31).

And so David does *not* attribute his deliverance to his wife Michal, but rather praises his God who delivered him by means of her help and deception. William Plumer writes,

“Whatever means we adopt for our preservation, and however successful they may be, God is the sole author of deliverance, and we ought to pray, and praise, and preach accordingly.”³

To God alone be the glory. – Amen