

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The psalmist complains that strangers were risen up against him to take away his life, Psalm 54:1-3; expresses his confidence in God that he will uphold him, and punish his enemies, Psalm 54:4, Psalm 54:5; on which he promises to sacrifice to God, Psalm 54:6; he speaks of his deliverance, Psalm 54:7.

The title is, "To the chief Musician upon Neginoth, an instructive Psalm of David, when the Ziphites came to Saul, and said, Doth not David conceal himself among us?"

Ziph was a village in the southern part of Palestine. David having taken refuge in the mountains of that country, the Ziphites went to Saul, and informed him of the fact. Saul, with his army, immediately went thither, and was on one side of a mountain while David was on the other. Just when he was about to fall into the hands of his merciless pursuer, an express came to Saul that the Philistines had invaded Israel, on which he gave up the pursuit, and returned to save his country, and David escaped to En-gedi. See the account in 1 Samuel 23:19-29. It is supposed to have been after this deliverance that he composed this Psalm. Neginoth, from נָגַן (nagan) to strike or play on some kind of instrument, probably signifies stringed instruments, such as were played on with a plectrum.

Verse 1

Save me, O God, by thy name - Save me by thyself alone; so name here may be understood. The name of God is often God himself. David was now in such imminent danger of being taken and destroyed, that no human means were left for his escape; if God therefore had not Interfered, he must have been destroyed. See the introduction, Psalm 54:1-7 (note).

Verse 2

Hear my prayer - In his straits he had recourse to God; for from him alone, for the reasons alleged above, his deliverance must proceed.

Verse 3

Strangers are risen up against me - The Ziphites.

And oppressors - Saul, his courtiers, and his army.

They have not set God before them - It is on no religious account, nor is it to accomplish any end, on which they can ask the blessing of God.

Selah - This is true.

Verse 4

Behold, God is mine helper - This would naturally occur to him when he saw that Saul was obliged to leave the pursuit, and go to defend his territories, when he was on the very point of seizing him. God, whose providence is ever watchful, had foreseen this danger and stirred up the Philistines to make this inroad just at the time in which Saul and his army were about to lay hands on David. Well might he then say, "Behold, God is mine helper."

Is with them, that uphold my soul - נַפְשִׁי (naphshi), my life. This may even refer to the Philistines, who had at this time made an inroad on Israel. God was even with his own enemies, by making them instruments to save the life of his servant.

Verse 5

He shall reward evil - Saul and his courtiers, instead of having God's approbation, shall have his curse.

Cut them off in thy truth - Thou hast promised to save me; these have purposed to destroy me. Thy truth is engaged in my defence; they will destroy me if permitted to live: to save thy truth, and to accomplish its promises, thou must cut them off.

Verse 6

I will freely sacrifice unto thee - Or, I will sacrifice nobly unto thee. Not only with a willing mind, but with a liberal hand will I bring sacrifice unto thee.

For it is good - Thy name is good; it is descriptive of thy nature; full of goodness and mercy to man. And it is good to be employed in such a work: whoever worships thee in sincerity is sure to be a gainer. To him who orders his conversation aright, thou dost show thy salvation.

Verse 7

For he hath delivered me - Saul had now decamped; and was returned to save his territories; and David in the meanwhile escaped to En-gedi. God was most evidently the author of this deliverance.

Mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies - It is not likely that this Psalm was written after the death of Saul; and therefore David could not say that he had seen his desire. But there is nothing in the text for his desire; and the words might be translated, My eye hath seen my enemies - they have been so near that I could plainly discover them. Thus almost all the Versions have understood the text. I have seen them, and yet they were not permitted to approach me. God has been my Deliverer.