

Psalms 54:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength.

Analysis

Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. This opening petition requests divine deliverance and vindication, grounding the appeal in God's revealed character (name) and mighty power (strength). The psalm's superscription provides context: when the Ziphites betrayed David's location to Saul (1 Samuel 23:19-20, 26:1-2).

"Save me" (hoshi'eni, הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי) comes from yasha (יָשַׁע), meaning to save, deliver, rescue, bring to safety. This is the root of several biblical names: Joshua/Jesus (Yeshua) means "Yahweh saves"; Elisha means "God saves"; Isaiah means "Yahweh is salvation." David's cry is for rescue from mortal danger—Saul's pursuit, aided by Ziphite betrayal. This isn't abstract spiritual meditation but desperate prayer for physical preservation.

"O God" (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים) uses the generic name for God emphasizing power and majesty. While David often uses Yahweh (covenant name), here Elohim emphasizes God's might and authority. The Creator who has all power can deliver David from human enemies.

"By thy name" (beshimkha, בְּשִׁמְךָ) grounds the appeal in God's revealed character. In Hebrew thought, "name" represents the essential nature, reputation, and character of a person. God's "name" encompasses His attributes revealed through covenant history—His faithfulness, justice, mercy, power. To be saved "by God's name" means deliverance flows from who God essentially is, not from David's merit or cleverness. God acts consistently with His character. Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

"And judge me by thy strength" (וּבְגִבּוֹרְתְּךָ תִּדְיִנֵנִי, uvig'vuratekha tedinen, uses *din* (דִּין), meaning to judge, vindicate, defend in court. *Gevurah* (גְּבוּרָה) means strength, might, power. David requests judicial vindication backed by divine power. Saul accused David of rebellion; Ziphites betrayed David as a fugitive. David appeals to heaven's court: let God judge between David and his accusers, and let God's mighty power enforce the righteous verdict. This is appeal to higher authority when earthly authority fails.

Historical Context

The psalm's superscription references the Ziphites' betrayal: "when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" (Psalm 54 superscription; cf. 1 Samuel 23:19, 26:1). The Ziphites were Judean tribesmen—David's own people—living in the wilderness region where David fled from Saul. Rather than protecting their tribesman, they informed Saul of David's location, facilitating Saul's murderous pursuit. This was treacherous betrayal by those who should have been David's protectors.

First Samuel 23:14-29 narrates the tense pursuit. Saul and his men hunted David in the wilderness. David hid in strongholds and moved continuously to evade capture. At one point: "Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul" (1 Samuel 23:26). Only urgent news of Philistine invasion prevented Saul from capturing David. The danger was immediate and extreme.

David's appeal to be judged "by God's strength" reflects his consistent refusal to take personal vengeance. Twice David had opportunity to kill Saul when Saul was vulnerable (1 Samuel 24, 26), but David refused to harm "the LORD'S anointed." Instead, David appealed to God as righteous judge. First Samuel 24:12: "The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee." First Samuel 24:15: "The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."

This pattern of appealing to God rather than taking personal revenge anticipates New Testament teaching. Romans 12:19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." First Peter 2:23 describes Jesus: "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." David's prayers model trust in divine justice when human justice fails.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to be saved 'by God's name' rather than by your own merit, and how does this ground prayer in divine character?
2. How does appealing to God to 'judge me' (vindicate me) differ from defending yourself or taking personal revenge?
3. Why is requesting God to judge 'by His strength' important—how does divine power enforce divine justice?
4. When you face betrayal by those who should support you (like David's own tribesmen), how do you maintain trust in God rather than growing bitter?
5. How does Jesus's example of committing Himself to God who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23) fulfill the pattern David models in this psalm?

Interlinear Text

אֲלֹהִים	בְּשִׁמְךָ	הוֹשִׁיעַ נִי	וּבְגִבּוֹרֶתְךָ	תְּדִינֵנִי:
me O God	by thy name	himself with us Save	me by thy strength	and judge
H430	H8034	H3467	H1369	H1777

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 26:1 (Parallel theme): And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?

Psalms 20:1 (References God): The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;

Acts 4:12 (Salvation): Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Proverbs 18:10 (Parallel theme): The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Psalms 79:9 (Salvation): Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

Psalms 48:10 (References God): According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.