

Psalms 59:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me.

Analysis

Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. This urgent opening plea reveals David's desperate circumstances facing mortal danger. The superscription indicates Saul sent men to watch David's house to kill him (1 Samuel 19:11-17), when Michal helped David escape through a window. "Deliver me" (hatzileni, הַצִּילֵנִי) means snatch away, rescue, save from danger—urgent cry for immediate divine intervention.

"From mine enemies" (me'oyevai, מֵאֹיְבָי) uses the word for personal enemies, those who hate, are hostile, bear enmity. These aren't merely opponents or competitors but those actively seeking David's harm and death. The personal possessive "mine" emphasizes David's individual vulnerability—these enemies target him specifically.

"O my God" (Elohai, אֱלֹהָי) is deeply personal address—not merely "God" but "MY God," covenant relationship, personal possession. In crisis, David appeals to covenant relationship: God who has bound Himself to David in faithful love. This echoes the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4)—personal, covenant relationship with the living God.

"Defend me" (saggveni, שַׁגְּבֵנִי) means set me on high, protect, make inaccessible to enemies. The root suggests elevation to a secure, high place beyond enemy reach. This isn't merely defense against attack but being lifted beyond their ability to reach—God placing His servant in position of security above the fray.

"From them that rise up against me" (mimitqomemay, מִיִּמִּיתְקוֹמַמַּי) describes those rising up in rebellion, insurrection, violent opposition. These aren't passive enemies but active aggressors rising up to attack. The phrase emphasizes the enemies' initiative—they are actively pursuing, attacking, rising up against God's anointed. David faces not theoretical danger but imminent, active, violent threat to his life.

Historical Context

The historical context (1 Samuel 19:11-17) describes Saul's murderous rage after David's military success and popularity. Saul sent messengers to watch David's house overnight and kill him in the morning. Michal, David's wife and Saul's daughter, warned David and helped him escape through a window, then placed a household idol in the bed with goat's hair to deceive the assassins. This was David's first direct attempt on his life by royal command.

This incident marked a turning point—David could no longer dismiss Saul's hostility as temporary madness. The king had issued explicit orders for David's assassination, placing state resources behind the murder plot. David faced the full apparatus of royal power turned against him: soldiers, informants, political authority, and legal sanction. His only refuge was divine intervention.

Ancient Near Eastern royal courts were notoriously dangerous. Court intrigue, palace coups, and assassinations were common. When a king perceived threat to his throne—whether real or imagined—elimination of rivals was standard procedure. David's popularity after defeating Goliath and military success against Philistines made him appear as potential rival. The women's song 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands' (1 Samuel 18:7) sealed David's fate in Saul's paranoid mind.

For Israel facing persecution from pagan empires—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—Psalm 59 became a prayer of the vulnerable against powerful oppressors. When state power turned against God's people, they had no earthly refuge. Like David, they could only appeal to God for deliverance from enemies who 'rise up' with overwhelming force.

Early Christians facing Roman persecution found this psalm particularly meaningful. When imperial power declared Christianity illegal, when believers were hunted and martyred, they echoed David's cry: 'Deliver me from mine enemies.' Their confidence wasn't in political power or military might but in God who delivers those who trust Him.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does David's appeal to 'my God' demonstrate the importance of covenant relationship as the basis for seeking divine help in crisis?
2. What is the difference between asking God to 'deliver' (snatch away) versus asking Him to 'defend' (set on high), and how do both aspects address different dimensions of protection?
3. How does recognizing that enemies are 'rising up' (actively attacking) rather than merely existing affect our approach to spiritual warfare and prayer?
4. In what ways can believers today experience God 'setting them on high' above enemies—whether physical, spiritual, or psychological?
5. How does David's transparency in crying out urgently to God for deliverance provide a model for honest prayer during desperate circumstances?

Interlinear Text

הַצִּילֵנִי	מֵאֹיְבֵי י	אֱלֹהֵי י	מִמִּתְקֻמָּם י	תִּשְׁגָּבֵנִי:
Deliver	me from mine enemies	O my God	me from them that rise up	defend
H5337	H341	H430	H6965	H7682

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 18:48 (Resurrection): He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

Psalms 57:1 (References God): Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

Isaiah 33:16 (Parallel theme): He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

Psalms 143:9 (Parallel theme): Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.

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

Psalms 91:14 (Parallel theme): Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

Psalms 12:5 (Resurrection): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

Psalms 143:12 (Parallel theme): And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

Psalms 71:4 (References God): Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.