

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
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Psalm 144 — A New Song Renewed from an Old Song

1.0 Introducing Psalm 144

- Psalm 144 contains many phrases apparently re-used from Psalm 18. Compare verses 1–2 with 18:2, 34, 46–47; verse 3 with 18:4; verses 5–11 with 18:9, 14, 16, 17, 44–45, 50.
- David describes a very personal relationship with God in verses 1–2 (note the six occurrences of “my” with divine titles).
 - ✓ “David is utterly aware of his weakness. He is not swept up into being arrogant just because he is a king. However, David is not trembling in fear either, because his faith is real and the God in whom he has faith is all-powerful.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1245.
- Some manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint translation add “concerning Goliath” to the psalm heading. A Jewish Targum also associates the “evil sword” of verse 10 with Goliath’s sword (see 1 Sam 17:45, 47, 50–51).
- Even the grace-filled life experiences times of severe trial. When the trial has passed, the believer’s blessed peace is all the sweeter.
 - ✓ “The Psalm may be thought of as bright morning sunshine (1, 2), becoming overcast (3–11), but ending with a golden sunset (12–15).” — W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms*, 4 vols. in 1 (1948; repr., Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 4:94.

2.0 Reading Psalm 144 (NAU)

144:1 *A Psalm* of David.

Blessed be the LORD, **my rock**,
Who trains my hands for war,
And my fingers for battle;

144:2 **My lovingkindness** and **my fortress**,
My stronghold and **my deliverer**,

- My shield** and He in whom I take refuge,
Who subdues my people under me.
- 144:3** O LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him?
Or the son of man, that You think of him?
- 144:4** Man is like a mere breath;
His days are like a passing shadow.
- 144:5** Bow Your heavens, O LORD, and come down;
Touch the mountains, that they may smoke.
- 144:6** Flash forth lightning and scatter them;
Send out Your arrows and confuse them.
- 144:7** Stretch forth Your hand from on high;
Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters,
Out of the hand of aliens
- 144:8** Whose mouths speak deceit,
And whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.
- 144:9** I will sing a new song to You, O God;
Upon a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You,
- 144:10** Who gives salvation to kings,
Who rescues David His servant from the evil sword.
- 144:11** Rescue me and deliver me out of the hand of aliens,
Whose mouth speaks deceit
And whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.
- 144:12** Let **our sons** in their youth be as grown-up plants,
And **our daughters** as corner pillars fashioned as for a palace;
- 144:13** Let **our garners** be full, furnishing every kind of produce,
And **our flocks** bring forth thousands and ten thousands in **our fields**;
- 144:14** Let **our cattle** bear
Without mishap and without loss,
Let there be no outcry in our streets!
- 144:15** How blessed are the people who are so situated;
How blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 143

3.1 Outline

- I. Divine Protection and Human Frailty (vv. 1–4)
- II. Divine Action and Human Foes (vv. 5–8)
- III. Divine Salvation and Human Praise (vv. 9–11)
- IV. Divine Blessing and Human Prosperity (vv. 12–15)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “my rock”
 - David attributes several descriptions to God that refer to divine protection:

- ✓ “my rock” (v. 1)
- ✓ “My lovingkindness” (v. 2)—perhaps better translated as “my loyal help.”
- ✓ “my fortress”(v. 2)—a place of refuge like Masada (the name is related).
- ✓ “My stronghold” (v. 2)—someplace safe, out of the reach of enemies or any harm.
- ✓ “my deliverer” (v. 2)—my rescuer.
- ✓ “My shield” (v. 2)—close protection even when David is in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy.

■ ***How have you experienced any of these descriptions of God?***

- **v. 1** “my hands for war . . . my fingers for battle”
 - The word for “war” refers to close combat, hand-to-hand with the enemy. David’s hands must know how to wield the sword.
 - The word for “battle” is a broader term that can also refer to fighting from a distance, as with bow and arrow (or, in David’s case, with a sling). David would employ his fingers in using these weapons.
 - Not only does God protect David, but He also prepares him for being the anointed warrior-king of Israel.
 - ***How does God prepare you for what He has called you to do?***
- **v. 2** “my people”
 - Due to the violent nature of the word translated “subdues,” many commentators find a reference to Israel here a bit difficult.
 - ✓ Most of these commentators explain that David faced opposing factions who had previously supported Saul and that he later endured the rebellion led by his son Absalom.
 - Some translations utilize “peoples” (ESV, NRSV, NIV, NJPS).
 - ✓ Although the form of the Hebrew word is unusual for the plural, it is not unknown. For example, it occurs in Lamentations 3:14, where ESV, NRSV, and NJPS translate as “peoples.”
 - ✓ In the parallel text of Psalm 18:47 (Heb., 48) and 2 Samuel 22:48 the normal form of “peoples” appears.
- **v. 3** “what is man”
 - Compare the following:



Psalm 8:4

What is man [*'enosh*] that You take thought [*zkr*] of him,
And the son of man [*ben-'adam*] that You care [*pqd*] for him?

Psalm 144:3

O LORD, what is man [*'adam*], that You take knowledge [*yd'*] of him?
Or the son of man [*ben-'enosh*], that You think [*hshb*] of him?

- ✓ The differences seem to indicate that the terms for “man” overlap rather than demonstrate distinctly different meanings. They all refer to man in his weakness, not his strength or privilege. Mankind is frail and ephemeral (v. 4; cp. Ps 39:4–6).

- **vv. 5–6** Request for God’s Presence and Action
 - “Bow Your heavens” (v. 5): Normally the Scripture speaks of bowing/bending/inclining the ear (Ps 17:6; Prov 4:20; 5:1; 22:17). The idea is that heaven (by metonymy meaning God) would take notice.
 - “and come down” (v. 5): Compare the use of “come down” to describe God’s intervention on behalf of His people in such texts as Exodus 3:8; Isaiah 31:4; 64:1; and Micah 1:3. The verb also speaks of God’s appearance on Mt. Sinai when He gave the Law to Moses (Exod 19:11).
 - Smoke and lightning (vv. 5, 6) accompany the divine presence (theophany): Exodus 19:16, 18; 20:18; Deuteronomy 33:2; Job 36:30; and Psalm 104:32.
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- **v. 7** “Your hand” (lit., “Your hands”)
 - David asks that God’s hands rescue him from “the hand of” foreigners who are threatening him and the people of his kingdom. This could be a reference to the Philistines.
 - **vv. 7–8, 11** Refrain
 - Psalm 18 focuses on the brute strength of the enemies, while Psalm 144 emphasizes their deceit and falsehood. These enemies enter treaties that they violate and make promises they do not keep.
 - **v. 7** “great waters” (lit., “many waters”)
 - The waters represent the overwhelming numbers of foreign combatants and perhaps indicate several nations being involved.
 - **v. 9** “a new song” and “harp of ten strings”
 - See Psalm 33:2–3.
 - **v. 10** “David His servant”
 - Some commentators think that this is an odd way for David to refer to himself and therefore believe that David did not compose this psalm.
 - Cf. 1 Samuel 25:39; Psalm 78:70. Also, see the heading on Psalm 18.
 - **vv. 12–15** An Addition?
 - Many biblical scholars conclude that a later editor or reviser appended these final verses to an older psalm. Part of the reason is the unusual beginning of verse 12 (in the Hebrew; cp. “That” in NKJV and “Then” in NIV and NET) and a number of unusual words (like “garners” and “kind” in v. 13).
 - However, the flow of the text reveals a consistent message: praise for God (vv. 1–2), human inability (vv. 3–4), prayer for rescue (vv. 5–8), determination to give thanks (vv. 9–10), repetition of the main request (v. 11), then anticipation of the blessed results of divine deliverance (vv. 12–15).

- **vv. 12–14** Fulfillment of Covenant Blessings
 - Blessings on *Family* (v. 12): “our sons” and “our daughters”
 - Blessings on *Farm* (vv. 13–14b): “our garners” (= storehouses), “our flocks,” “our fields,” and “our cattle” (see below on this final phrase)
 - Blessings on *Fatherland* (v. 14c): “our streets”
 - Compare Deuteronomy 28:1–8.
- **v. 14** “Let our cattle bear”
 - The following is an alternative translation for this difficult Hebrew verse:

Let our leaders bear *their* burden
Without the breach *of city walls* and deportation;
Let there be no cries *of alarm* in our city squares.
 - See Amos 4:3 for the concepts “breach” and “go out.”
 - Otherwise, if the reference is to cattle, the “mishap” and “loss” indicate miscarriages.
- **v. 15** “How blessed”—A Double Beatitude
 - Only one more beatitude appears in the Psalter: Psalm 146:5.
 - Blessing comes because of a people’s relationship to God.
 - ***Count your blessings. Evaluate your nation’s situation regarding divine blessing.***

4.0 Singing Psalm 144

“O God, The Strength of Those Who War”

(Tune: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”)



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| <p>1 O God, the Strength of those who war, The Hope of those who wait, Be with our sons gone forth to fight, And those who keep the gate.</p> <p>3 In Thee alone we place our hope, Thou Keeper of the just, And Thou, through fight and fire and fears Wilt justify our trust.</p> | <p>2 Breathe on our land the spirit calm Which faith in right bestows, And in the hours of dark suspense A faith which stronger grows.</p> <p>4 Thy ways are wonderful, O God, Who makest wars to cease: O let this be the final war That ushers in Thy peace.</p> |
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— Words: William B. Carpenter (1841–1918)
Music: William Croft (1708)

“To Thee, Eternal Soul Be Praise”

(Tune: “And, Can It Be”)

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| <p>1 To Thee, Eternal Soul, be praise! Who, from of old to our own days, Through souls of saints and prophets, Lord, Hast sent Thy light, Thy love, Thy Word.</p> | <p>2 We thank Thee for the love divine Made real in every saint of Thine; That boundless love itself that gives In service to each soul that lives.</p> |
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3 We thank Thee for the Word of might
Thy Spirit spake in darkest night.
Spake through the trumpet voices loud
Of prophets at Thy throne who bowed.

4 Eternal Soul, our souls keep pure,
That like Thy saints we may endure;
Forever through Thy servants, Lord,
Send Thou Thy light, Thy love, Thy Word.
— Words: Richard W. Gilder (1905)
Music: Karl P. Harrington (ca. 1905)

5.0 Praying Psalm 144

- How I praise You, Lord, for teaching me. [v. 1]
- Thank You, Father, for protecting me and my family. [v. 2]
- I am amazed at Your concern and care for me. [v. 3]
- Lord, protect me from those who would deceive me. [v. 8]
- O God, keep me singing of You and Your works. [v. 9]



6.0 Applying Psalm 144

- God both protects and prepares us for how He wants us to serve Him.
- God's people must battle the forces of falsehood and deception.
- God's blessings extend to our family, our livelihood, and our community.

This sentence [v. 15b] is also a sort of correction of all that had gone before; as if the poet would say—all these temporal gifts are a part of happiness, but still the heart and soul of happiness lies in the people being right with God, and having a full possession of him. Those who worship the happy God become a happy people. Then if we have not temporal mercies literally we have something better: if we have not the silver of earth we have the gold of heaven, which is better still.

C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols.
(reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:360