

The Song of a King for Himself and His People

Psalm 144

Introduction: 1) It is good for our spiritual life and health when we know who God is, who we are, and what we can trust God to do for us. Psalm 144 helps us gain clarity in each of these areas, while pointing us to the final, climactic and eschatological victory of the Davidic Messiah, King Jesus. Our Lord is a Warrior and a blessing, as a warrior, to his people.

2) Psalm 144 is something of a mixture, looking back and drawing significantly from earlier psalms, especially Psalm 18. Richard Belcher points out, “Psalm 144 is placed in the final Davidic collection of the Psalter (138-145), keeping alive the hopes of the post-exilic community for a Davidic king [v. 10]. Thus, the psalm looks forward and expresses the hope of victory and blessing through him...The final victory of God’s people will result in an outpouring of eschatological blessings (144:12-15) and the participation of all creation in the praise of God (150)” (*The Messiah and the Psalms*, 154).

3) The flow of the psalm can be seen in three movements. First, we see who God is for the King, but also for those who follow this king (vv. 1-2). Second, we will see what God does for the King and for those of us who reside in his kingdom (vv. 3-11). Finally, we will see who God blesses (vv. 12-15). The expected and wonderful answer is “the people whose God is the Lord.”

I. Look at who our God is 144:1-2

With language borrowed from Psalm 118, “a thanksgiving song of David,” (Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3, 895), David blesses the Lord (*Yahweh*) who has prepared him for battle and war. Yahweh specifically “trains my hands for battle and my fingers for warfare” (v. 1). I am ready to fight for the Lord because the Lord has made me ready to fight! But who is this God who has prepared him? Who is this God who “subdues my people under me” (v. 2), who gives the King his kingdom and defeats his enemies? Seven powerful images tell us exactly who this God is. Note how often the word “my” appears. These affirmations are intimate and personal.

1) He is our rock 144:1

The Lord is strong and immovable, solid and dependable (cf. 18:31, 46; 19:14; 28:1; 31:3). Jesus says the wise man builds his house on the rock which is the Word of God (His words, Matt 7:24-25). The Lord is our rock, a solid foundation.

2) He is our faithful love 144:2

The Lord is our *hesed*, “my faithful love.” The Lord is “mercy,” “my loving God” (*NIV*), “my steadfast love” (*ESV*), “my lovingkindness” (*NKJV*). My Lord is the faithful God of covenant love and loyalty. He will not leave or forsake me (Heb. 13:5).

3) He is our fortress 144:2

The Lord is “my fortress,” a strong place of safety when pursued or under attack. I run to you my Lord and you protect me and put my soul at rest.

4) He is our stronghold 144:2

This idea builds on the previous one of God as our fortress. The *NKJV* translates the word as “high tower.” The idea is the Lord is a safe and secure place to flee when assaulted and attacked by the enemy.

5) He is our deliverer 144:2

The Lord helps me escape like a fugitive on the run (cf. Ps. 18:21 40:17; 70:5). The Lord comes to my rescue when hounded and pursued by my enemies.

6) He is our shield 144:2

The Lord protects me when attacked. He keeps me from harm and injury (Ross, 896). Paul reminds us to put on the “shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). What a great protector is *Yahweh*.

7) He is our refuge 144:2

The Lord is the place of supreme protection and safety. The psalms especially love this image using it over and over (Ps. 2:12; 5:1, 11; 7:1; 9:9; 11:1; 14:6; 16:1; 17:7; 18:2, 30; 25:20; 31:1, 2, 4, 19; 34:8, 22; 36:7; 37:39,

40; 43:2; 46:1; 52:7; 57:1; 59:16; 61:3, 4; 62:7,8; 64:10; 71:1, 3, 7; 73:28; 90:1, 2, 4 9; 94:22; 104:18; 118:8, 9; 141:8; 142:4; 144:2). The language of these verses echo Psalm 18. They also echo 2 Samuel 22 when David sang to the Lord for “rescuing him from the grasp of all his enemies and from the grasp of Saul” (22:1). There he sang, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God my rock where I seek refuge. My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior, you save me from violence” (22:2-3). Psalm 144 teaches us that David never forgot who the Lord is. Neither should we.

II. Look at what our God does 144:3-11

Verses 3-11 make an amazing turn. The God who trains the Davidic King for war is actually the Lord who fights for him and rescues him (v. 10-11). This is all the more amazing when we recognize who God is and who man is!

1) He has come down to rescue lowly humanity 144:3-8

Verse 3 draws directly from Psalm 8:4. David is amazed the Lord condescends and pays any attention at all to lowly humans. What can we possibly do for the incredible God of verses 1-2? We are “a breath” and our “days are like a passing shadow” (v. 4). We are brief, fleeting, here today and gone tomorrow. Still, we look to our Lord and pray. We

petition Him and ask Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The language which follows is almost apocalyptic. It again draws from Psalm 18 and is reminiscent of Mt. Sinai. Ross perceptively notes, “The psalmist was praying for some immediate intervention. But the final answer to this prayer will undoubtedly be at the second coming of the Lord, when he does actually come down and destroy the wicked. So here is another case of a messianic interpretation that uses a type to point to the time when the poetic language will become historically literal” (Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 898). “Lord” intervene. “Part your heavens and come down.” Show your awesome power. “Touch the mountains, and they will smoke” (v. 5). Bring divine judgment. “Flash your lightning and scatter the foe,” the enemy. “Shoot your arrows and rout them” (v. 6). In verse 7 David get precise and personal. “Reach down from on high; rescue me from deep water, and set me free from the grasp of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies, whose right hands are deceptive” (vv. 7-8). David is deep in trouble and only God can save him. He may have been trained for battle, but he is not match for his many enemies. They are outside invaders who lie both in what they say and what they do. They are liars in word and deed. Warren Wiersbe writes, “They told lies and took oaths they never meant to keep. When they lifted their right hand in an oath, it

was only deception” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry*, 375). David faced an enemy that was cruel, deceptive and powerful. He needed his Lord to come down and save him. We are no different. We need our God to come down and “rescue and deliver” us. Praise God he has in the coming of Jesus.

2) He gives victory to King David His servant 144:9-11

These verses sing with Messianic hope and expectation. The King is confident that the Lord will come to his rescue. He is so confident he says, “I will sing a new song to you, O God” (v. 9). In context this is a new song of salvation and victory. He will sing this song and “play on a ten-stringed harp.” The one to whom he will play and sing is the Lord “who gives victory to kings, who frees (*ESV*, “rescues”) his servant David from the deadly (*ESV*, “cruel”) sword” (v. 10).

Verse 11 repeats the refrain of verses 7-8. They frame verses 9-10, and add an intensity to the King’s desperate plea for rescue and deliverance. Spurgeon writes, “Oh to be delivered from slanderous tongues, deceptive lips, and false hearts! No wonder these words are repeated, for they are the frequent cry of many a tried child of God’ –“*Rid me and deliver me.*” The devil’s children are strange to us: we can never agree with them, and they will never understand us, they are aliens to us, and we are despised

by them. O Lord, deliver us from the evil one, and from all who are of his race.” (*TOD*, vol. 3, 358).

III. Look at who our God blesses 144:12-15

The blessings God bestows on the Davidic King, the Messiah King, now overflow to the people of God. The rescue and deliverance of the King results in abundant blessings for “the people whose God is the Lord” (v. 15). What God does for the Sovereign, He does for the Sovereign’s subjects.

1) He blesses our sons 144:12

The “sons will be like plants nurtured in their youth.” They will flourish, mature and become strong, as they put down their roots (Ross, 902).

There is a strength given by the Lord to the men of the nation.

2) He blesses our daughters 144:12

The daughters will be “like corner pillars that are carved in the palace style.” They will be like “polished gracefulness...they will be flourishing in full vigor and wonderful beauty into the next generations” (Ross, 902). They will be beautiful, statuesque and elegant.

3) He blesses our produce 144:13

“The storehouses (*ESV*, “granaries”) will be full, supplying all kinds of produce.” Famine will not be a concern in this kingdom (cf. Deut. 28:4).

The barns in the land will be overflowing with more than enough for everyone.

4) He blesses our livestock 144:13-14

God will also bless the livestock in great abundance. The “flocks will increase by thousands and tens of thousands in open fields” (v. 13).

“Cattle will be well fed” (*ESV*, “may our cattle be heavy with young,”; *NIV*, “our oxen will draw heavy loads”). All that we need to prosper and flourish in the land will be provided in super abounding quantity. As the song well says, in that day “there shall be showers of blessing.”

5) He blesses all His people 144:14-15

The song builds and concludes with its climax. In the eschatological kingdom there is safety and blessings for “the people whose God is the Lord” (*Yahweh*). First, “there will be no breach in the walls, no going into captivity.” (The *ESV* takes the phrase to refer to the cattle and translates it, they will “suffer no mishap or failure in bearing.” We follow here the *CSB* reading). No army will break down the walls and invade our city. Never again will we be exiled to a foreign land and enslaved to foreign rulers (cf. Amos 4:3). Second, and as a result of this promise, there is “no cry of lament (*ESV*, “distress”) in our public squares” (*ESV*, “in our streets,” cf. Jere. 14:2). Never again will God’s people wail and

cry out in lament and sorrow because foreign enemies have invaded the land and carried loved ones into captivity. God has come down and rescued His people. And this rescue is permanent and everlasting! Such a promise of victory calls for a shout of praise: “Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord” (ESV).

Conclusion

Michael Wilcox provides a very fitting word to conclude our study. May all us reflect on what he says. “Then and now, whenever God’s people are under assault they do well to remind themselves of all that their *loving God* has done for them in the past, insignificant though they are. They can quite properly ask him to act in ways that even in modern times might be described as the rending of the heavens, a bolt of lightning, rescue from a sea of troubles. They know that his, and their, chief weapon is the truth of the gospel, to destroy the lies which . . . are the secret of the enemy’s great strength. They are sure that nothing but good can result, even from the most disastrous circumstances, when God’s people are taking refuge in the Rock.” (*The Message of Psalms 73-150*, BST, 271).