

# Psalm 54

## Psalm 54:1–22

## David Trusts God to Deliver him from all his Foes

### Outline of Chapter 54:

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Doctrines Covered	Doctrines Alluded To

**Introduction:** The Ziphites went to Saul on two occasions. The first time it had occurred, David had just delivered Keilah from the Philistines, and the Ziphites went to Saul and said, “[Is David not hiding himself near us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon?](#)” (1Sam. 23:19). The second time that the Ziphites went to Saul, they said, “[Isn’t David hiding on the hill of Hachilah, facing Jeshimon?](#)” (1Sam. 26:1). In the introduction to this psalm, we have the same verb and preposition as we find in 1Sam. 23; therefore, we will reasonably assume that David wrote this psalm about the same time that the Ziphites told Saul where he was (obviously, David would have found out about their betrayal at a later date. I suspect that David wrote this when Saul came after him, and later, when he found out that it was the Ziphites who betrayed him, added this information to the inscription.

You may wonder why we spend any amount of time determining when a particular psalm was written. Many of these psalms give us clues as to David’s spiritual progress. We see where he has been, what tests he was faced, and what benefits he has reaped. Whereas the narrative in 1Samuel tells us what happened; the psalms tells us what David was thinking at the time; or, if you would rather, what doctrine is circulating in his consciousness, in his frame of reference, in his mentality.

Now let me give you some more historical perspective on this psalm: Saul forced David to leave his home in the middle of night back in 1Sam. 19; had he not done so, Saul would have seized him and attempted to kill him. Even though David was able to form a true alliance with Saul’s son, Jonathan, this only resulted in Saul verbally tearing into Jonathan for defending David (1Sam. 20). In David’s flight from Saul, David does make a few missteps. First of all, he goes to Nob, city of the priests, and gets consecrated bread loaves to eat—in doing so, he misleads one of the priests, Ahimelech. The result of this is, Saul wipes out all of the adult priests, and only one from this line was able to escape (1Sam. 21–22). While hiding out, David finds out that the Philistines have invaded Keilah, and David and his men rescue Keilah. Saul finds out from the Ziphites David’s whereabouts through the Ziphites, and he and his army have come after David. In fact, at the last minute, right before Saul is about to discover David, he and his army are called back into combat against the Philistines, who have made another raid on Israel (1Sam. 23). David writes this psalm, after that narrow escape. In fact, if you would like a more precise time frame, David

probably writes this after 1Sam. 25, after God has allowed David to see the death of one enemy; however, David's thoughts are more actively directed toward Saul and the Ziphites—hence the inscription.

In this psalm, David asks God for His deliverance. Men have risen up against David; in fact, godless men of violence seek his life (v. 3). David asks for vindication and he asks for deliverance (v. 1). He knows that God is his helper and the One Who sustains him in a crisis (v. 4). David is further assured that God will deal with his enemies (v. 5). At the end, David realizes that God has delivered him out of all trouble (v. 7).

Clarke also gives us a summary of this psalm: *The psalmist complains that strangers were risen up against him to take away his life (vv. 1–3); expresses his confidence in God that he will uphold him, and punish his enemies (vv. 4–5); therefore, he promises to sacrifice to God (v. 6); and then he speaks of his deliverance (v. 7).*<sup>1</sup>

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## Psalm 54 Inscription

Just so you know, in the Hebrew, the inscription is vv. 1–2. In some places, the first three verses are all gathered up as one verse. However, in most (if not all) English, we have the inscription followed by v. 1 (which is v. 3 in the Hebrew). That being said, also recall that these verse divisions are not a part of inspiration and apparently occurred sometime in the first millennium A.D.

Slavishly literal:

**To a Preeminent [One]: (in a Ngiynah [or, a song arranged for stringed instrument]), a maskil [or, an instructive psalm] to David; in a going of the Ziphites and so they say to Saul, "Is not David hiding with us?"**

Psalm  
54 inscription

Moderately literal:

**To the Preeminent One: a song [played on a stringed instrument]—an instructive psalm for [or, *belonging to*] David—when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, "Isn't David hiding near us?"**

**To the one who is pre-eminent: a song played on a stringed instrument, an instructive psalm written by David when the Ziphites went to Saul and said, "Isn't David hiding near us?"**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

### Early translations:

The Dead Sea Scrolls	.
The Peshitta	[none]
The Septuagint	For the end, among the hymns of instruction by David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, "Lo, is not David hid with us?"

### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV	(For the music leader. Use with stringed instruments. A special psalm that David wrote when the people of Ziph went to Saul and said, "David is hiding here with us.")
NLT	For the choir director: A mediation of David, regarding the time the Ziphites came and said to Saul, "We know where David is hiding." To be accompanied by stringed instruments.

### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

<sup>1</sup> Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*; from e-Sword, Psalm 54.

God's Word™

For the choir director; on stringed instruments; a maskil by David when people from the city of Ziph told Saul that David was hiding among them.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

*The Amplified Bible*

To the Chief Musician with stringed instruments. A skillful song or a didactic or a reflective poem of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, David is hiding among us.

MKJV

To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A contemplation. A Psalm of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself among us?

*Young's Updated LT*

To the Overseer with stringed instruments. —An instruction, by David, in the coming in of the Ziphim, and they say to Saul, "Is not David hiding himself with us?"

In the Hebrew, the inscription is the first two verses of this psalm.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David dedicates this psalm, prescribes the instruments to be used, and tells us that this is an instructive psalm. The time coordinate of this psalm is when the Ziphites told Saul where David was.

### Psalm 54 inscription a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lâmed (ל) (pronounced <sup>l</sup> )	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
nâtsach (נָצַח) [pronounced <i>naw-TZAHKH</i> ]	<i>to oversee, to supervise; to be preeminent, to be enduring; the Preeminent One</i>	Piel participle with the definite article	Strong's #5329 BDB #663

The Piel participle of nâtsach is given a wide variety of renderings: *overseer* (Young), *the music leader* (CEV), *choir director* (NASB, NLT), *choirmaster* (Owens), *leader* (NRSV, NEB, NAB) and *chief musician* (Rotherham).

**Translation: To the Preeminent One:...** First of all, Psalm 54, even though it is addressed in many Bibles to the *choirmaster*, took place when David was in the vicinity of the Ziphites, who were willing to give him up to Saul (1Sam. 23:19). This is contained further down in the inscription. Therefore, we have three possibilities: (1) this word does not mean *choirmaster* (at least, not exclusively); (2) this psalm was not written during this particular time period; or (3) David wrote this during this time period, and then presented it to the choirmaster many years later. However, as we have studied in previous psalms, there is no reason to give a musical interpretation to this common term found at the beginning of many psalms. Furthermore, we find this phrase at the beginning of many psalms when David was on the run from Saul, before he had a choir or a choir master. There is no reason to assume that David appointed someone in his band of 600 men a choirmaster.

The first noun in this inscription is an interesting one, and given many different renderings: *choir director*, *choirmaster*, *music leader*, *leader*, *chief musician*. However, as I have mentioned before, there was no official choir or palace orchestra. In fact, to get any sort of music at all in the palace, Saul sent for David, one lone guitarist. Given the music-therapy which Saul's staff recommended (1Sam. 16:14–19), and given that Saul pretty much acted like a madman for the next decade or so, we can reasonably assume that, when these events took place that are mentioned in the remainder of this inscription, that Saul never organized any sort of in-house music after David became a fugitive. Therefore, there is no reason to interpret the Piel participle of nâtsach as *choirmaster*, *choir leader*, or *choir-anything*.<sup>2</sup> Another, and better, interpretation is that the *Preeminent One* could be a reference to God, and David prays in the follow psalm to God (note the vocative, *Elohim*, in vv. 1–2).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, David could have written this psalm many, many years later in retrospect. However, I see that as unlikely.

### Psalm 54 inscription b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בַּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
n <sup>e</sup> gîynâh (נְגִינָה) [pronounced n <sup>e</sup> gee- NAW]	<i>music from stringed instruments; a stringed instrument; a song or psalm [especially arranged for stringed instruments]; a song of derision</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #5058 BDB #618

**Translation:** ...a song [played on a stringed instrument]... At this point, we do not really know for sure how to render this. N<sup>e</sup>gîynâh is found in Job 30:9 in the titles of Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76 Psalm 69:12 77:6 Isa. 38:20 Lam. 3:14 5:14 Habak. 3:19. In every case, the word is associated with a psalm or Hebrew poetry. The verb that this word is based upon—nâgan (נָגַן) [pronounced naw-GAHN]—means *to touch the strings, to play a stringed instrument*. This is a word we have already come upon in 1Sam. 16:16 18:10 19:9 Strong's #5059 BDB #618. Since n<sup>e</sup>gîynâh is based upon nâgan, we can reasonably assume that it is related to music, and more specifically to stringed instruments.

In Job 30:8–9, n<sup>e</sup>gîynâh appears to be a song of derision, as Job tells his friends how embarrassed he is to have become the *taunt* of fools as well as a byword for them. This appears to have a similar usage in Psalm 69:12 Lam. 3:14. However, there seems to be no such connotation of derision in the inscriptions of the other psalms or in Psalm 77:6 Isa. 38:20 Lam 5:14 Habak. 3:19 (therefore, this connotation is more of the exception than the rule).<sup>3</sup> Our most reasonable guess is, this is a song played on a stringed instrument or arranged for a stringed instrument.

### Psalm 54 inscription c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
mas <sup>e</sup> kîyl (מַשְׁכִּיל) [pronounced mahs <sup>e</sup> - KEEL]	<i>an instructive psalm; a contemplative poem; transliterated maskil</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #4905 BDB #968
lâmed (ל) (pronounced l <sup>e</sup> )	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
Dâvid (דָּוִד); also Dâvîyd (דָּוִיִּד) [pronounced daw- VEED]	<i>beloved and is transliterated David</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #1732 BDB #187

**Translation:** ...—an instructive psalm for [or, belonging to] David—...

Although many good translations tend to transliterate this as *maskil*, I think that we can safely refer to this as an *instructive psalm*, given that there is no question about this words ties to the Hiphil (causal stem) of sâkal, which

<sup>3</sup> Also, there is another similar word, based upon the same verb, which is used in a derisive, mocking way. Strong's #4485 BDB #618.

means *to instruct, to make prudent, to teach*. We find this used in the titles of Psalms 32, 42, 44, 45, 52–55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142.

I have translated and exegeted a number of Davidic psalms and it was not until this one where I really understood the use of the lâmed preposition. You see, what I would expect to find here is the bêyth preposition. In fact, so would every other exegete. But that is not what we have. Therefore, we are given the additional meanings *of, belonging to, written by* for the lâmed preposition, even though we do not really find that sort of connotation outside of the psalm inscriptions. Here is the deal: some artists who write music speak of their music is already being out there, and they reach out and take it; or they discover it. When David uses the lâmed preposition, he is saying roughly the same thing. These psalms are written just as much *for him* as *by him*. Many of the Davidic psalms are written while David is under tremendous pressure, and through the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, David gets his mind wrapped around divine viewpoint, as opposed to human viewpoint.

Now, if it was you or I who was unjust persecuted by Saul, we might do something about it. I mean, we might plot to kill Saul. After all, we could reason, it is kill or be killed. David's men will reason with him similarly in 1 Sam. 24:4 and 26:8. And there is the further rationalization that David was already named to be Saul's successor by God through Samuel. So, most of us, faced with the same dilemma as David finds himself, might be willing to strike back. However, David, instead of retaliating against Saul, thinks about it, and God the Holy Spirit guides David to write songs which deal with God's approach, God's vantage point, God's plan. These psalms are not dictated to David, but they are certainly inspired via God the Holy Spirit, and related directly to the difficulties that David is facing. Therefore, these psalms are *for* David. And, now that they have been written down and recognized as being a part of the canon of Scripture, these psalms are now *for* us, to guide us to understand divine viewpoint. Therefore, note what David will say in this psalm; and note, more importantly, how the words of this psalm guide his behavior in 1 Sam. 23–24.

The remainder of this inscription is v. 2 gives us the historical context of this psalm.

### Psalm 54 inscription d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בֵּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
When the bêyth preposition is followed by an infinitive, it forms a periphrasis for the gerund and is commonly expressed by the conjunctions <i>while, when, in that, after that, if, though, even if</i> . <sup>4</sup>			
bôw' (בּוֹא) [pronounced boh]	<i>to come in, to come, to go in, to go, to enter</i>	Qal infinitive construct	Strong's #935 BDB #97
zîyphîym (זִיפִיִּים) [pronounced zee-FEEM]	transliterated <i>Ziphites</i>	plural gentilic adjective with the definite article	Strong's #2130 BDB #268
wa or va (וּ) [pronounced wah]	<i>and so, and then, then, and</i>	wâw consecutive	No Strong's # BDB #253
'amar (אָמַר) [pronounced aw-MARH]	<i>to say, to speak, to utter; to say [to oneself], to think</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect	Strong's #559 BDB #55

<sup>4</sup> Okay, a periphrasis is *a round about way of speaking or saying something*. A gerund is a verb which often functions as a noun (in English, our gerunds often end in *ing*).

### Psalm 54 inscription d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lâmed (ל) (pronounced <sup>l</sup> )	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
Shâ'ûwl (לולא) [pronounced <i>shaw-OOL</i> ]	which is transliterated <i>Saul</i> ; it means <i>asked for</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #7586 BDB #982

**Translation:** ...when the Ziphites went and said to Saul... Recall that David, in the midst of worrying about himself, was commissioned by God to go and deliver the men of Keilah from a Philistine attack. David did so, but was warned that the people of Keilah would betray him to Saul. Therefore, David went and hid in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. However, even in those days of small populations, the Ziphites were aware of David and his 600 men taking refuge in that area. Now, no doubt they knew that David also delivered the people of Keilah. However, for whatever reason, some of the Ziphites betrayed David to Saul. They actually went directly to Saul to meet up with him. Why, you may ask? Just in case there was any reward which would be a part of providing Saul with this information. They may find a position in Saul's cabinet; they may receive a monetary reward. The idea is, these men were expecting something in return.

### Psalm 54 inscription e

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
hă (ה) [pronounced <i>heh</i> ]	interrogative particle which acts almost like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence. The verb <i>to be</i> may be implied.		Strong's #none BDB #209
lô' (לא or לא') [pronounced <i>low</i> ]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
Dâvid (דָּוִד); also Dâvîyd (דָּוִיִּד) [pronounced <i>daw-VEED</i> ]	<i>beloved</i> and is transliterated <i>David</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #1732 BDB #187
çâthar (סתר) [pronounced <i>saw-THAR</i> ]	<i>to hide onself</i>	Hithpael participle	Strong's #5641 BDB #711
'îm (עִם) [pronounced <i>geem</i> ]	<i>with, at, by, near</i>	preposition of nearness and vicinity; with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural suffix	Strong's #5973 BDB #767

**Translation:** "Isn't David hiding near us?" As already mentioned, this portion of the inscription is very closely aligned with the Hebrew of 1Sam. 23:19; much more so, than when they run to Saul again with similar information in 1Sam. 26:1. Therefore, we may reasonably place this psalm around the time of 1Sam. 23; furthermore, this psalm helps to better understand David's actions in 1Sam. 24.

David was in the mountains of the wilderness of Ziph. When the Ziphites went to Saul, they gave him very specific coordinates by which to find David (1Sam. 23:19). Again, this was not done with some purpose of seeing justice

done—these men wanted a reward of some sort from Saul. These were godless men who acted purely in self-interest.

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## David Asks God for Vindication, as Violent Men Have Risen Against Him

Slavishly literal:

**Elohim, in Your name, deliver me;  
in Your strength, judge me.**

Psalm  
54:1

Moderately literal:

**O Elohim, deliver me by Your name;  
judge [or, vindicate or evaluate] me by Your  
power.**

**Oh God, deliver me by You name  
and evaluate me with Your power.**

Here is how others have handled this verse:

### Early translations:

The Peshitta                      Save me, God, by Your name and judge me by Your strength.  
The Septuagint                  Save me, God, by Your name and judge me by Your might.

### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV                                      Save me, God, by your power and prove that I am right.  
NLT                                      Come with great power, O God, and rescue me!  
    Defend me with your might.

### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

God's Word™                      O God, save me by your name, and defend me with your might.  
JPS (Tanakh)                      O God, deliver me by Your name;  
    by Your power vindicate me.

### Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:

Updated Emphasized Bible      O God! <By Your own Name> save me,  
    And <by Your own strength> will You vindicate me?  
MKJV                                      Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength.  
Young's Updated LT              O God, by Your name save me, and by Your might judge me.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David asks God to vindicate and deliver him.

## Psalm 54:1a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾēlōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	gods or God; transliterated Elohim	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43

## Psalm 54:1a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (ב) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
shêm (שׁוֹם) [pronounced shame]	<i>name, reputation, character</i>	masculine singular noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #8034 BDB #1027
yâsha <sup>h</sup> (יִשָּׂא) [pronounced yaw-SHAHQ]	<i>to deliver, to save; to set free, to preserve; to aid, to give relief</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #3467 BDB #446

**Translation:** [O Elohim, deliver me by Your name;...](#) David is being constantly persecuted by Saul. Every time he tries to do anything, Saul hears about it and is there. He knows that he cannot kill Saul; he knows that God has declared him king; but, Saul is persecuting him all the same. David wants God to deliver him, as his own hands are tied.

David does not simply ask for deliverance, but he asks for deliverance *by God's Name*. God's Name refers to God's essence. God has anointed David as the next king over Israel. Since God has taken that step, even though it was before a small family gathering of probably skeptical family members, God's reputation stands upon David becoming king. If David does not become king, then God is not God. Therefore, God must deliver David, because His character depends upon it. God has promised, therefore God must deliver. So David can use the imperative here and get away with it. David knows Who and What God is, and therefore, David can call upon God to do that which His character forces Him to do.

As I have mentioned, examining these psalms tells us what David is thinking. They chronicle his spiritual growth. Most people, when they are in trouble and they pray to God, they either pray, "Please, God, help!" Or they pray, "If you get me out of this jam, I will go to church every week" (as though sitting their tired butt down in a pew makes God's day). Or, in the second case, they bargain with God in some way. David uses neither of these approaches. David *orders* God to deliver him, and bases this upon God's character. God's character demands that God rescue David. Do you see what an advance that is over pleading or bargaining? David reveals that he knows God must save him.

**Application:** Even though David has confidence in God, this does not mean that he will act like an idiot. As we will see throughout 1Samuel, David will continue to keep his distance from Saul (except for when Saul comes right to him, to his territory). My point is, you don't necessarily behave like an idiot if you have confidence in God. For instance, you may have confidence that God will find you work so you can feed your family; but that does not mean that you sit on your butt in front of the tv for the next few months, because God will find you a job. That is not faith; that's ignorance. David has confidence in God, but that does not result in him acting ignorant.

## Psalm 54:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w <sup>e</sup> (or v <sup>e</sup> ) (ו) [pronounced weh]	<i>and, even, then; namely</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251

## Psalm 54:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
g <sup>e</sup> bûwrâh (גְּבוּרָה) [pronounced g <sup>e</sup> voo-RAW]	<i>strength, might; fortitude, military virtue; power; victory</i>	feminine singular noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #1369 BDB #150
dîyn (דִּין) [pronounced deen]	<i>to judge, to correctly evaluate, to evaluate, to condemn, to vindicate; to defend [the right of anyone]; to rule, to regulate; to contend with</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperative with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #1777 BDB #192

**Translation:** ...judge [or, vindicate or evaluate] me by Your power. God not only will judge, but He has the power and authority to judge. He can examine all that has happened and properly evaluate the situation. In particular, David tells God to evaluate him, to determine that his actions have been reasonable and righteous.

David is also asking for vindication; he wants God to declare him righteous; to declare that what he has done has been righteous. In fact, this may be even more of David's meaning here. In 1Sam. 24:15, David says to Saul, "Jehovah therefore will judge and decide between you and me, and may He see and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand." This quotation, by the way, is more closely associated to Psalm 54 than anything in 1Sam. 26 (the second time the Ziphites gave David up to Saul). In 1Sam. 26, David is not as concerned about being seen as vindicated before Saul, but Saul's determination to kill him has become a matter of curiosity to David ("What have I done? What evil is in my hand?"). By the time we get to 1Sam. 26, David is not as concerned about being vindicated before Saul as he is simply conveying that he could have killed Saul, but he chose not to. And David says this in a very loud voice, so that all Saul's army could hear him.

As a side note, when dealing with a psalm like this one, the sort of mind that I have requires me to inquire, *which Ziphite betrayal is David referring to; the first or the second?* However, after spending about a week exegeting this psalm, it is clear to me that David wrote this psalm after the first time the Ziphites betrayed his location to Saul.

By the way, David asking to be vindicated in the psalms actually occurs on several occasions: **Judge me, O Jehovah, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity on me** (Psalm 7:8b). Psalm 26:1 reads: **Vindicate me, O Jehovah; for I have walked in my truthfulness. I have trusted also in Jehovah; I shall not slide.** In fact, because David asks for God to vindicate him in this psalm, we can reasonably guess that this would be the proper time to teach this psalm (along with the previous two psalms, which seem to be tied to Psalm 26). Another psalm which belongs in this time period is Psalm 43, the first verse of which reads: **Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Oh deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.**

**Elohim, hear my prayer;  
give ear to words of my mouth.**

Psalm  
54:2

**O Elohim, hear my prayer  
and listen to the words of my mouth.**

**O God, hear my pray and listen to the words I say.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

**Early translations:**

The Septuagint                      O God, hear my prayer; listen to the words of my mouth.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

CEV                                      Listen to my prayer and hear what I say.  
 NLT                                      O God, listen to my prayer.  
     Pay attention to my plea.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™                      O God, hear my prayer, and open your ears to the words from my mouth.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

MKJV                                      Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.  
 Young's Updated LT                      O God, hear my prayer, Give ear to the sayings of my mouth,...

**What is the gist of this verse?** David tells God to listen to him, and to pay attention to what he has to say.

Psalm 54:2a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾēlōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	gods or God; transliterated Elohim	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
shâma' (שָׁמָע) [pronounced shaw-MAHG]	to listen, to hear, to listen intently, to listen and obey, to listen and act upon, to listen and give heed to, to hearken to, to be attentive to, to listen and take note of, to listen and be cognizant of	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperative	Strong's #8085 BDB #1033
t <sup>e</sup> phillâh (תְּפִלָּה) [pronounced t <sup>e</sup> -phil-LAWH]	prayer, intercession, supplication for any one; prayer or supplication in general; a hymn or inspired song	feminine singular noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #8605 BDB #813

**Translation:** O Elohim, hear my prayer... David calls out to God with two imperatives. David is a believer in Jesus Christ, so not only can he pray to God, but he can demand that God hear him. Furthermore, David is a growing believer, so what he has to say has content. Recall the illustrations I just gave: some believers plead with God and others bargain; David demands to be delivered on the basis of God's character. As a believer, he actually has something to say. In fact, he actually is writing the Word of God at this moment, so he has a great deal to say.

## Psalm 54:2b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾāzan (אָזַן) [pronounced aw-ZAHN]	<i>to broaden out the ear with the hand in order to hear; give ear and answer; to listen and obey; to listen; to weigh</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative with the voluntative hê	Strong's #238 BDB #24
lâmed (ל) (pronounced P)	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
ʾāmârîym (אִמְרֵי) [pronounced uh-maw-REEM]	<i>words, commands, mandates; speech, that which proceeds from the mouth</i>	masculine plural construct	Strong's #561 (& #562) BDB #56
peh (פ) [pronounced peh]	<i>mouth, edge</i>	masculine singular noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #6310 BDB #804

**Translation:** ...and listen to the words of my mouth. This is the second imperative of this verse. David tells God to listen to what he is saying. David's content is as important as his request. And again, this is an imperative. David is able to speak to God in the imperative primarily because it is in accordance with God's promises to David—God sent Samuel to anoint David king over all Israel. David can (1) expect God to listen to his anointed one and (2) David may demand that God preserve him, as God made him next in line to rule over Israel. David makes a similar request at the beginning of Psalms 4 5 55.

**Application:** What is your spiritual impact? How faithful have you been to your spiritual calling and your spiritual gift? Not one of us is indispensable; however, some believers function while filled with the Holy Spirit and they make use of the spiritual gift that God has given them. There are many other believers who, after salvation, are never filled with God the Holy Spirit, following their first sin, and never have used their spiritual gift. If you have no spiritual impact, then God has no reason to keep you around (except as a test to other believers).

**For strangers rose up against me  
and terrifying [men] have sought my soul.  
They have not placed Elohim to their front.  
Selah.**

Psalm  
54:3

**For enemies [or, strangers] have arisen  
against me;  
and terrifying [or, fierce] men seek my life.  
They do not place Elohim before them.  
[Pause]**

**For enemies have risen up against me and vicious and terrifying men seek to kill me.  
They are not guided by God.  
[Musical interlude]**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Peshitta

For strangers rise up against me and the mighty seek after my life. They have disregarded you, O God.

The Septuagint

For strangers have risen up against me, and mighty men have sought my life. They have not set God before them. Pause.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

CEV  
NAB  
NLT

Cruel strangers have attacked and want me dead. Not one of them cares about you.  
The arrogant have risen against me;  
the ruthless seek my life;  
they do not keep God before them. *Selah*

For strangers are attacking me;  
violent men are trying to kill me.  
They care nothing for God. *Interlude*

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™  
JPS (Tanakh)

Strangers have attacked me. Ruthless people seek my life. They do not think about God. *Selah*

For strangers have risen against me,  
and ruthless men seek my life;  
they are unmindful of God.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

The Amplified Bible  
MKJV  
Young's Updated LT

For strangers *and* insolent men are risen up against me, and violent men *and* ruthless ones seek *and* demand my life; they do not set God before them. *Selah* [pause, and calmly think of that]!

For strangers have risen up against me, and cruel men seek after my soul; they have not set God before them. *Selah*.

For strangers have risen up against me And terrible ones have sought my soul, They have not set God before them. *Selah*.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David tells God that strangers have risen up against him and that violent men seek his life. These are men who have no interest in God.

Psalm 54:3a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced <i>kee</i> ]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
zûwr (זֹרֵר) [pronounced <i>zoor</i> ]	<i>a stranger, an alien; an enemy; of another family; a strange woman, an adulteress; strange children [bastards]; unlawful; another; new, unheard of; unauthorized person</i>	masculine plural, Qal active participle	Strong's #2114 BDB #266
Two early printed editions and the Aramaic have <i>insolent men</i> here instead. <sup>5</sup>			

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 556. The English translation of the Aramaic which I own reads *strangers*. *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text*; George Lamsa's translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta; Harper Collins; ©1968 by A.J.Holman Co.; p. 613.

## Psalm 54:3a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
qûwm (קוּמ) [pronounced <i>koom</i> ]	<i>to stand, to rise up, to establish, to establish a vow, to cause a vow to stand, to confirm or to fulfill a vow</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal perfect	Strong's #6965 BDB #877
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i> ]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over, by, beside</i>	preposition of proximity with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5921 BDB #752

**Translation:** **For enemies** [or, *strangers*] **have arisen against me;**... Even though it is correct that enemies have arisen against David, the use of the word stranger is more telling. These are his fellow countrymen; these are men who are his kin, so to speak; and they rise up against him. Men who should treat David as their brother; men David has delivered; and they rise up against him as if they are strangers. In this particular case, it is the Ziphites—men who do not know David personally. They are willing to trade him in for whatever favors they will receive from Saul.

**Application:** There will be those who rise up against you, who do not know you. This is part of the Christian life. You may be thinking, *hell, I didn't sign up for this*. Sorry to inform you, but with becoming a believer also comes some additional problems. However, God gives us the resources to deal with these problems. Let me offer you an analogy: everyone thinks that their life would be suddenly better if they had \$10,000,000. They seem to think that if they suddenly got ten million dollars, that everything would be the same, except they could buy more stuff and not have to worry about bills. If you had ten million dollars, there would be a plethora of changes in your life, and not all of them good. Even putting aside the actuality that with blessing comes responsibility, problems also come with certain blessings (in fact, wealth could even be considered a curse, in some cases). Ask the athlete or the celebrity who is sued for no real reason and blackmailed into settling with those who deserve nothing—because this is the cheapest way to deal with being sued. With money comes high taxes, high lawyer bills, hundreds of additional decisions, etc. And you are thinking, *no problem; I'm up for that; I'm sitting on enough money to deal with the extra headaches*. Bingo. Now you get the analogy. So it is with the Christian life—you have just had \$10,000,000 put into your bank account. You are richer than you could ever imagine. However, with these riches comes a few headaches. But, it is okay—you have enough by way of assets to deal with all of these problems.

In fact, let's just take this in points:

### The Ten Million Dollar Analogy

1. Becoming a believer in Jesus Christ is like having \$10,000,000 put into your bank account.
2. When you find yourself with sudden wealth, you also take on a plethora of problems, many of which you never anticipated.
3. When you believe in Jesus Christ, you suddenly find yourself with a plethora of problems, many of which you never anticipated.
4. With \$10,000,000 comes higher taxes, people who want to steal this from you, high lawyer fees, and a plethora of headaches and people that prior to this wealth, were not a part of your life.
5. With Jesus Christ as your Savior comes the attack of Satan's demon cadre, which may take the form of problems with other believers or unbelievers that you never had trouble with before. Furthermore, from God, you face divine discipline when you are out of fellowship, as well as testing and additional experiences which you would not have had as an unbeliever.
6. If one day, you have nothing, and the next day, you have \$10,000,000; guaranteed, you will hear from a lawyer. He may offer his services to you or he may contact you with intent to sue—but you will hear from a lawyer.

### The Ten Million Dollar Analogy

7. Once you have believed in Jesus Christ, you will become a part of the angelic conflict. Satan’s demons will contact you in some way or another. Now, don’t panic—God does not allow them to manifest themselves to you—but they will attack in one way or another. They will observe and look at you for your many failings. Once you are a believer, demon attacks will become a part of your life.
8. With an additional \$10,000,000 in your account, you might be able to afford a lawyer to deal with attacks from other lawyers. With this money, you have the means to deal with many of the problems that suddenly have become a part of your life.
9. When you believe in Jesus Christ, you are given about 40 things at salvation\*—at least 39 irrevocable operating assets (and one revokable asset—the filling of God the Holy Spirit). God gives you the ability and the spiritual assets to deal with demon attacks.
10. When you believe in Jesus Christ, then you face divine discipline—that is, when you sin and get out of fellowship, then God may discipline you. However, God has given you the solution: the filling of God the Holy Spirit. All you need to do is name your sin or sins to God, and God forgives you, based upon the cross; and God the Holy Spirit fills you (see 1Cor. 11:31 1Jouhn 1:9).
11. After you believe in Jesus Christ, you will face certain tests; however, God will see that you are never tested beyond what you can bear. This is a promise from God. 1Co 10:13: **No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**
12. In the analogy, the idea is, no matter what changes and problems that you face as a result of having a sudden \$10,000,000 added to your banks account, the amount of money in your bank account should help you to deal with these changes.
13. In the spiritual life, when you believe in Jesus Christ, you end up signing on for much more than you initially anticipate—you are thrown into the middle of the angelic conflict and God the Father becomes your personal father. However, God also has seen to it that you have enough assets in your life to be able to deal with the additional changes, problems and responsibilities that you have assumed when you became a child of God.

\*Bob Thieme Jr. and Bob Thieme III both list 40 things which we receive at salvation; a visiting pastor said there were 47 (if memory serves me). Regardless of the exact number, the idea is we are given sufficient spiritual assets to deal with whatever problems beset us.

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### Psalm 54:3b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong’s Numbers
w <sup>e</sup> (or v <sup>e</sup> ) (ו) [pronounced <i>weh</i> ]	<i>and, even, then; namely</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong’s # BDB #251
ʿârîyts (אַרְיָצַ) [pronounced <i>gaw-REETS</i> ]	<i>terrifying, horrifying, causing fear; very powerful; violent, fierce; awe-inspiring</i>	masculine plural adjective	Strong’s #6184 BDB #792
bâqash (בִּקַּשׁ) [pronounced <i>baw-KAHSH</i> ]	<i>to seek, to search, to desire, to strive after, to attempt to get, to require, to demand, to ask, to seek with desire and diligence</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural, Piel perfect	Strong’s #1245 BDB #134

## Psalm 54:3b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ) [pronounced <i>NEH-fesh</i> ]	<i>soul, life, living being, desire</i>	feminine singular noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5315 BDB #659

**Translation:** ...and terrifying [or, fierce] men seek my life.... Recall that Saul took his best soldiers out against David. These were men whose profession was killing. They were adept and well-trained, and therefore terrifying. Recall that David was not a large man. He was muscular and well-built, but he was smaller than most soldiers. Furthermore, there were 3000 well-trained men, men with combat experience, who were out to kill him. The point is, David was in serious danger; but he also had serious protection.

## Psalm 54:3c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lô' (לֹא) [pronounced <i>low</i> ]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
sîym (שָׂם) [pronounced <i>seem</i> ]; also spelled sûwm (שָׂמוּ) [pronounced <i>soom</i> ]	<i>to put, to place, to set, to make</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural, Qal perfect	Strong's #7760 BDB #962
ʿĕlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced <i>el-o-HEEM</i> ]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
lâmed (ל) [pronounced <i>l</i> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
neged (נֶגַד) [pronounced <i>NEH-ged</i> ]	<i>what is conspicuous</i> when it is a substantive and, as a preposition, <i>in front of, in the sight of, opposite to, before</i> (in the sense of being <i>in front of</i> )	preposition with the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural suffix	Strong's #5048 BDB #617

Together, the lâmed preposition and neged mean *in front of, before [someone], in the sight of, in the presence of; standing opposite, standing in front of*.

**Translation:** ...They do not place Elohim before them.... Here is the problem as David sees it. These men do not value God. They do not really worship God. Therefore, their values are all messed up. The key in this life is not getting along with your fellow man, but having the right relationship with God (compare Psalm 36:1 53:4).

These men are the antithesis of David, who writes in Psalm 16:8: *I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken*. The idea is, those named here (the Ziphites as well as Saul's army), act without any consideration as to what is right or wrong by the standards of God. Without a clear sense of authority, endangering David's life or even taking David's life is not a concern of their conscience. They are concerned about what is in it for them; but they are not concerned with the rightness or wrongness of their actions. God is not before them; they do not look to God for guidance.

## Psalm 54:3d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
çelâh (חֲלֹה) [pronounced seh-LAW]	<i>to lift up, to elevate, to exalt [with one's voice], to gather, to cast up [into a heap]; it is transliterated Selah</i>	interjection	Strong's #5542 BDB #699

The verbal cognate is ḥâlâh (חֲלֹה) [pronounced saw-LAW], which means *to lift up and toss aside*. In the Piel stem, it means *to weigh*, which involves lifting up the object and placing it upon the balance. Gesenius gives the meaning of çelâh as *rest, silence, pause*, as çelâh does not necessarily have to match the meaning of its cognates. My thinking, which is a combination of BDB and Gesenius, is that the voices build up to a crescendo here, and, very likely, they are then followed by a vocal (but not necessarily, musical) silence. This would reconcile the points made by Gesenius and still make this compatible with its cognates.<sup>6</sup> Another very reasonable possibility is that the instruments *are lifted up* for a musical interlude. The NLT translation of *Interlude* is very good.

**Translation:** ...[Pause] At this point, we are to stop and to ponder David's words, as he plays a musical bridge or interlude. This can also indicate a change of pace or a slight change of focus in the psalm itself.

Spurgeon: "Selah." *As if he said, "Enough of this, let us pause." He is out of breath with indignation.*<sup>7</sup>

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## God Will Help David and Dispense with His Foes

**Behold, Elohim, a helper to me;  
my Adonai upholding my soul.**

Psalm  
54:4

**Listen, Elohim [is] my helper  
and my Adonai sustains my soul.**

**Listen, God is my helper and my Lord will sustain my soul.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

### Early translations:

The Peshitta	Behold, God is my helper; the LORD sustains my soul.
The Septuagint	For lo! God assists me; and the Lord is the helper of my soul.

### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV	You will help me, Lord God, and keep me from falling;...
NAB	God is present as my helper; the Lord sustains my life.
NJB	But now God is coming to my help, the Lord, among those who sustain me.
NLT	But God is my helper, The Lord is the one who keeps me alive!

<sup>6</sup> For more discussion, see H.W.F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; ©1979 by Baker Books; p. 588.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David*; e-Sword, Psalm 54:1–3.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

*God's Word™* God is my helper! The Lord is the provider for my life.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

*MKJV* Behold, God is my helper; Jehovah is with those who uphold my soul.  
*Young's Updated LT* Lo, God is a helper to me, The Lord is with those supporting my soul,...

**What is the gist of this verse?** God helps David, and gives David inner resources to deal with his problems.

**Psalm 54:4a**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
hinnêh (הִנֵּה) [pronounced hin-NAY]	<i>lo, behold, or more freely, observe, look here, look, listen, pay attention, get this, check this out</i>	interjection, demonstrative particle	Strong's #2009 (and #518, 2006) BDB #243
ʿēlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
ʿāzar (עָזַר) [pronounced gaw-ZAHR]	<i>helper, one who aids; an ally</i>	Qal active participle	Strong's #5826 BDB #740
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l̄]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510

**Translation:** Listen, Elohim [is] my helper... In the previous verse, David has concentrated on his enemies. The last thing that he said about them was, they did not place God before them. On the other hand, David has a helper in God. This is more than a man who places God in the forefront and considers his own actions in the light of eternity; David is a man who can look to God for help. His relationship with God is the antithesis of the relationship that his enemies have with God.

Recall the analogy that I offered: a relationship with God is like having ten million dollars deposited into your bank account. You have a few more problems, but then you have the assets with which to deal with those problems. One of those assets is God Himself; God willingly helps those who belong to Him.

**Psalm 54:4b**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿādôwn (אֲדֹנָי) [pronounced aw-DOHN]	<i>lord, master, owner, superior, sovereign; transliterated adonai</i>	masculine plural noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural suffix	Strong's #113 BDB #10
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88

Psalm 54:4b			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
<p>çâmak<sup>e</sup> (çâmq)                      [pronounced saw-MAHK<sup>e</sup>]</p>	<p><i>to lean, to rest; to uphold, to support, to sustain, to aid; to place, to lay [something upon something else]; to approach</i></p>	<p>masculine plural construct, Qal active participle</p>	<p>Strong's #5564                      BDB #701</p>
<p>nepesh (nephesh)                      [pronounced NEH-fesh]</p>	<p><i>soul, life, living being, desire</i></p>	<p>feminine singular noun with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular suffix</p>	<p>Strong's #5315                      BDB #659</p>

**Translation:** ...and my Adonai sustains my soul. Even in his darkest hours, David is supported by the Lord. What is important here is, God sustains David's soul; God sustains David's inner self. Notice that what is important is David's soul. When we are under pressure, the first thing that we call for is for God to remove the pressure. If we have a problem, we ask God to remove that problem. David does not do that; he recognizes here that God is his helper and that God sustains him—internally. Here, in the center of this psalm, we have David expressing his confidence in perfect God.

I gave you an analogy about being saved is like receiving ten million dollars. One chief difference is, if you do not have the internal resources to deal with ten million dollars, not only are you increasing the number of headaches in your life, but you lack the internal resources to deal with these headaches. Furthermore, even though you have more problems, and more money—in the analogous situation—you are also placed in a position where you cannot back out. You cannot go back to having little or no money; but now, you are actually less happy with more money. The Christian way of life is different. God gives us the inner resources to deal with our newfound treasures. He gives us the inner resources to deal with our new problems. All it takes is some spiritual growth, and that comes via doctrine and the filling of the Holy Spirit. However, the end result is, whatever changes that becoming a believer puts us through, God gives us the ability to deal with these changes. He gives us the inner resources.

We find this theme of God as our helper throughout Scripture: Psalm 118:6, 7, 13 1Chron. 12:18 Isa. 41:10 42:1 50:7-9 Rom. 8:31 Heb. 13:6.

**He causes to return the evil to my adversaries**

**He causes [their] evil to return [or, the evil is caused to be returned]; in Your faithfulness, make them silent.**

Psalm 54:5

**He causes [their] evil to return [or, the evil is**

**caused to be returned] to my adversaries; silence them [or, destroy them] in Your faithfulness [or, reliability].**

**He causes their evil to return to my adversaries; destroy them in Your faithfulness.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

**Early translations:**

The Peshitta  
 The Septuagint

Bring disaster to my enemies; silence them in Your truth.  
 He will return evil to my enemies; utterly destroy them in Your truth.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

CEV ...you will punish my enemies for their evil deeds. Be my faithful friend and destroy them.

NAB	Turn back the evil upon my foes; in your faithfulness, destroy them.
NLT	May my enemies' plans for evil be turned against them. Do as you promised and put an end to them.
REB	May their own malice recoil on the foes who beset me! Show yourself faithful and destroy them.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™ JPS (Tanakh)	My enemies spy on me. Pay them back with evil. Destroy them with your truth! He will repay the evil of my watchful foes; by Your faithfulness, destroy them!
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**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

MKJV NRSV	He shall reward evil to my enemies; cut them off in Your truth. He will repay my enemies for their evil, In your faithfulness, put an end to them.
Young's Updated LT	Turn back does the evil thing to mine enemies, In Your truth cut them off.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David asks for God to send back evil to his enemies (the same evil they mean for him); and he asks for God to put an end to them.

Psalm 54:5a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
shûw <sup>b</sup> v (שׁוּב) [pronounced shoo <sup>b</sup> v]	<i>to cause to return, to bring, to be caused to turn back mentally, reminisce, to return something, to restore, to bring back, to regain, to recover, to make restitution, reconsider, think again, or to be caused to return</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect	Strong's #7725 BDB #996
ra' (רָע) [pronounced rahg']	<i>evil, bad, wicked; evil in appearance, deformed; disagreeable, displeasing; unhappy, unfortunate; sad</i>	masculine singular noun with the definite article	Strong's #7451 BDB #948
Written [Let] evil [or, mischief] turn back; read:: [Let] him turn back evil [or, mischief]. In one early printed edition, in the Aramaic and in the Septuagint, it also reads: [Let] him turn back evil [or, mischief]. <sup>8</sup> I came up with my final translation apart from knowing this.			
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l']	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 556. I made some slight changes; this was not quoted exactly from Rotherham.

## Psalm 54:5a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
shârar (שָׂרַר) [pronounced shaw- RAHR]	<i>to twist, to twine; to be firm, hard; to press together; to oppress; in the plural participle, adversaries, enemies; [evil] observers, [insidious] watchers</i>	masculine plural, Qal active participle (possibly a Poel participle); with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #8324 BDB #1004

There are several problems with this word. Owen lists it simply as a masculine plural noun. BDB also lists it as a masculine plural noun, rendering it *[insidious] watcher*. The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament and Gesenius both consider this to be a masculine plural, Qal (or possibly Poel) active participle which only occurs in this form in Scripture (the Hebrew Concordance lists the passages Psalm 5:8 54:5 56:2 59:10; BDB adds Psalm 27:10 (11) 92:11(12)). The relative plethora and variety of meanings are due to disagreeing Hebrew scholars, rather than because there are many meanings that we could attach to this word. There appears to be a disagreement as to how this word is spelled, which would of course affect how we read it. The verb as listed by Gesenius and the Hebrew Concordance is found nowhere else. The renderings *[insidious] watcher, [evil] observer; oppressor, adversary, enemy* are all apropos to the passages where shârar occurs.

**Translation:** He causes [\[their\] evil to return](#) [or, *the evil is caused to be returned*] [to my adversaries](#);... David's adversaries have done nothing but send evil his way. David says that this evil to be returned upon them. I have inserted the word *their* as this verse speaks of the evil being *returned* or *turned back*. This implies that the evil came from David's adversaries.

**Application:** I talked to someone the other day, and they had been hurt by another person and they wanted to tell him what he did was wrong and they wanted to prevent this person from doing this again. However, this was a personal matter; what this woman would say would probably have little or no effect on this guy. However, she could rest assured that God would deal with this guy. David promises that to us right here.

You will note that, despite the confusion of this portion of v. 5, this is not ever confused with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular. That is, David does not come to God in prayer and say, "Let me kick their butts. They have been a ain in mine for the past several years; let me get my revenge on them." That is not an issue. David never makes a request like that. He asks for God to do this.

I want you to note something else. Since I have placed this psalm where it belongs, after 1Sam. 23, it has a much richer meaning. David is not some kid who is being bullied on the playground and he wants God to kid these kids because they are mean to him. These are men who daily seek David's life. This is their focus, and it is without reason that they chase after David. David is completely innocent of all the alleged charges made against him by Saul. My point is, even under these life and death conditions, David still is satisfied leaving revenge in God's hands. "God, you take the evil they mean for me and turn it around against them." It is legitimate to make this kind of prayer.

**Illustration:** I was removed from a teaching position, and one of the reasons cited was, I did not spend enough time preparing my students for a standardized test. My students did not need extensive preparation for this test and they did well on this test. However, I left this school. Two years later, after even more time was devoted to doing well on these tests, math scores at my old school dropped 25 points (out of 100), the largest drop I believe that they ever experienced. The test was changed, and since they spent all their time preparing for one test, they could not do well on the next. Not only this, but their scores were consistently below the Texas average, when, in previous years, this suburb was known for its excellent schools. The fact that I was removed was evil. The machinations behind it were evil; God took this evil and turned it upon those few who had a hand in my removal. I did not even

know if this passage when all of this occurred, but I certainly recognize in retrospect its application to my circumstances.

Now, I do not want you to mistake what you find here for *karma*. There is certainly a principle of karma in the universe, and that is often a person's nasty behavior is often returned in revenge by some that he has hurt. And there is the ultimate karma of, if you sin, and you are an unbeliever, then you will die in your sins. But there is no carefully designed *tit for tat*. The amount of evil you send out into the universe is not the amount that you receive back. In fact, religions which hold to this also hold to reincarnation because they believe, of course, that since karma is so obviously out of sync with what people actually do that, there must be a next time around to balance the scales somewhat. The Bible does not teach that. What the Bible teaches here is, David has observed that the evil which is directed towards him is turned around and returned to those who sent it out in the first place. The idea is, David is a believer in Jesus Christ, and, therefore, is afforded God's protection. Those who lift their hands up against David are lifting their hands against the Lord of Glory; and therefore, there is hell for them to pay. We find a similar sentiment expressed in Psalm 31:23 137:8 2Tim. 4:14 Rev. 18:6

### Psalm 54:5b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (ב) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
ʿēmeth (אֱמֶת) [pronounced EH-meth]	<i>firmness, faithfulness, truth, certainty, stability, perpetuity, fidelity, reliable, stable, dependable</i>	feminine singular noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #571 BDB #54
tsâmath (צַמַּת) [pronounced tzaw-MATH]	<i>to bring to silence; to be silent, to leave off speaking; to cut off, to destroy [or causal forms of these meanings]</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative with the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural suffix	Strong's #6789 BDB #856

**Translation:** ...[silence them](#) [or, [destroy them](#)] [in Your faithfulness](#) [or, [reliability](#)]. We have two separate but related meanings for the verb here. David asks God to either silence or destroy his enemies. By destroying them, they would obviously be silenced forever.

Now, how does God's faithfulness and reliability factor into this?

### What Does it Mean: [Silence \[or, destroy\] Them in Your Faithfulness ?](#)

1. God had promised David that he would be king over all Israel.
2. God cannot lie. God can be trusted to fulfil His promises.
3. This is what it means for God to be faithful or reliable.
4. All of God's actions must be within the confines of His character.
5. When God makes a promise, God will keep that promise. His character depends upon it.
6. Therefore, one of the givens in David's life is, he will become king over Israel. God has already anointed David king over Israel.
7. In order for David to rule over Israel, God will have to remove Saul.
8. David can depend upon God's faithfulness to do this.
9. In order for David to rule over Israel, he will have to still be alive when Saul dies.

## What Does it Mean: **Silence [or, destroy] Them in Your Faithfulness ?**

10. This is not unlike eternal security.
11. This means that those who come to Saul, with machinations to destroy David must be silenced at some point in time.
12. This means that all of David's enemies who stand in the way of him becoming king must be destroyed.
13. Finally, all of this depends upon God's character: upon His reliability and faithfulness.
14. What is occurring here is, not only is David waiting on God, but God is also waiting upon David.
15. God is waiting for David to develop the character and ability to rule over Israel.
16. Since God is omniscient, and since God transcends time, God can see that David will some day be one of the greatest saints of history.
17. Therefore, God is simply waiting for David to develop the capacity to lead the nation Israel.

Now, do you see just how important historical context is? It is historical context which allows us to understand precisely what David is talking about. This psalm is based upon an illustration. We are enriched when we know both the psalm and the illustration.

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### David Thanks God for His Deliverance

**In freewill, I slaughter to You;  
I thank Your name, O Y<sup>h</sup>owah, for [it is]  
good;...**

Psalm  
54:6

**With a freewill sacrifice, I slaughter [an animal]  
to You;  
I give thanks [for] Your name, because [it is]  
good;...**

**I offer a freewill sacrifice to You;  
I give thanks to Your name, for it is good;...**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Peshitta	I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O LORD, for it is good.
The Septuagint	I will willingly sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for [it is] good.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV	I will bring a gift and offer a sacrifice to you, LORD. I will praise your name because you are good.
NLT	I will sacrifice a voluntary offering to you; I will praise your name, O LORD, for it is good.

#### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

<i>God's Word</i> <sup>TM</sup>	I will make a sacrifice to you along with a freewill offering. I will give thanks to your good name, O LORD.
JPS (Tanakh)	Then I will offer You a freewill sacrifice; I will praise Your name, LORD, for it is good,...

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

<i>Updated Emphasized Bible</i>	<With a freewill-offering> [or, <i>freely</i> ], I will sacrifice to You; I will praise Your Name, O Yahweh, for it is good.
<i>MKJV</i>	I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O Jehovah, for <i>it is</i> good.
<i>Young's Updated LT</i>	With a free will-offering I sacrifice to You, I thank Your name, O Jehovah, for <i>it is</i> good,...

**What is the gist of this verse?** David will slaughter an animal to Jehovah God, because that is the basis of his salvation. He praises God's name, because it is good and dependable (God's name = His reputation).

**Psalm 54:6a**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
n <sup>e</sup> dâbâh (נְדָבָה) [pronounced n <sup>e</sup> -DAW <sup>b</sup> -VAW]	<i>freewill, readiness of mind [to give], freely, with a willing mind, willing to volunteer; a spontaneous offering, a freewill sacrifice; largeness, abundance</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #5071 BDB #621
zâbach (זָבַח) [pronounced zaw <sup>b</sup> -VAHKH]	<i>to slaughter [usually an animal for sacrifice]</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect with the voluntative hê	Strong's #2076 BDB #256
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular; pausal form	No Strong's # BDB #510

**Translation:** *With a freewill sacrifice, I slaughter [an animal] to You;...* God cannot be separated from His sacrifice on our behalf. We have no relationship to God apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, David makes mention of animal sacrifices, as that is the fundamental basis for his relationship to God. Here, this would be a sacrifice of thanksgiving (which would be a votive or freewill offering—Ex. 35:29 36:3 Lev. 7:16 Num. 15:3 29:39).

**Psalm 54:6b**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
yâdâh (יָדָה) [pronounced yaw-AWH]	<i>give thanks</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Hiphil imperfect	Strong's #3034 BDB #392
shêm (שֵׁם) [pronounced shame]	<i>name, reputation, character</i>	masculine singular noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #8034 BDB #1027

## Psalm 54:6b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
YHWH (יהוה) [pronunciation is possibly <i>yhoh-WAH</i> ]	transliterated variously as <i>Jehovah, Yahweh, Y<sup>e</sup>howah</i>	proper noun	Strong's #3068 BDB #217
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced <i>kee</i> ]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
ṭôwb (טוֹב) [pronounced <i>toh<sup>b</sup>v</i> ]	<i>pleasant, pleasing, agreeable, good, better</i>	masculine feminine singular adjective which acts like a substantive	Strong's #2896 BDB #373

**Translation:** ...I give thanks [for] Your name, because [it is] good;... David will depend upon God's name (or, *reputation*), because God is good and God can be depended upon. Recall the last few words of v. 5 and how God's faithfulness can be tied to David's enemies getting theirs.

Now, some people, you can depend upon the fact that they will do wrong, or that they will consistently do evil—they are dependable in that way. God is dependable insofar as, He will always do that which is right. Our best interests are always in the forefront. We can trust that God is good.

David's thought is continued and completed below:

**...for from all anguish He has delivered me  
and at my enemies has looked my eye.**

Psalm  
54:7

**...for He has delivered me from all anguish  
and my eye has looked upon [or, seen into] my  
enemies.**

**...for He has delivered me from all my anguish  
and my eye has looked down upon my enemies.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Peshitta	For You have delivered me out of all troubles; and my eye has seen my enemies defeated.
The Septuagint	For You have delivered me out of all affliction, and my eye has seen [my desire] upon my enemies.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV	You have rescued me from all of my troubles, and my own eyes have seen my enemies fall.
NLT	For you will rescue me from my troubles and help me to triumph over my enemies.
REB	God has rescued me from every trouble; I look with delight on the downfall of my enemies.

#### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

God's Word™  
JPS (Tanakh)

Your name rescues me from every trouble. My eyes will gloat over my enemies.  
...for it has saved me from my foes,  
and let me gaze triumphant upon my enemies.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

*The Amplified Bible*

For He has delivered me out of every trouble, and my eye has looked [in triumph] on my enemies.

MKJV

For He has delivered me out of all trouble; and my eye has seen *its desire* on my enemies.

*Young's Updated LT*

For, from all adversity He delivered me, And on my enemies has my eye looked!

**What is the gist of this verse?** David willingly offers a sacrifice to God, as He has delivered David from every adversity, and David has been able to see his enemies in the aftermath.

### Psalm 54:7a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced <i>kee</i> ]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
min (מִן) [pronounced <i>min</i> ]	<i>from, off, out from, out of, away from, on account of, since, than, more than, greater than</i>	preposition of separation	Strong's #4480 BDB #577
kôl (כֹּל) [pronounced <i>kohl</i> ]	<i>every, each, all of, all; any of</i>	masculine singular construct not followed by a definite article	Strong's #3605 BDB #481
tsârâh (צָרָה) [pronounced <i>tzaw-RAW</i> ]	<i>anguish, adversity, affliction, travail, trouble and distress</i>	feminine singular noun	Strong's #6869 BDB #865
nâtsal (נָצַל) [pronounced <i>naw-TSAHL</i> ]	<i>to snatch away, to deliver, to rescue, to snatch out of danger, to preserve</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil perfect; with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5337 BDB #664

**Translation:** ...for He has delivered me from all anguish... We should notice two things here: God has delivered David as a completed action. It may not have come to pass yet, but it is looked upon as a completed action. Secondly, what God has delivered David from is anguish and stress; not from adversity. We are placed in adversity all of the time. That is a constant in our life; maybe not every day, but often. This is where David is—he is under adversity. Therefore, what is important to him is how he reacts to it. How he feels while under adversity; in this case, how does he feel when Saul and his army pursues him. You see, David's end has already been determined: he will become king over Israel. Similarly for us, our life is also laid out before us; what is important is, how do we react to it. God has delivered us from all stress and anguish as related to our lives. **Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all** (Psalm 34:19; see also 1Sam. 26:24 2Sam. 4:9 2Tim. 4:17–18).

Henry comments: *David is a type of Christ; God would deliver him out of all the troubles of his state of humiliation, and he was perfectly sure of it; and all things are said to be put under his feet; for, though we*

see not yet all things put under him, yet we are sure he shall reign till all his enemies be made his footstool.<sup>9</sup>

### Psalm 54:7b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
w <sup>e</sup> (or v <sup>e</sup> ) (ו) [pronounced <i>weh</i> ]	<i>and, even, then; namely</i>	simple wâw conjunction	No Strong's # BDB #251
b <sup>e</sup> (ב) [pronounced <i>b<sup>eh</sup></i> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	No Strong's # BDB #88
ʿaya <sup>b</sup> v (אֵיבָיִם) [pronounced <i>aw-YA<sup>B</sup>V</i> ]	<i>enemy, the one being at enmity with you; enmity, hostility</i>	masculine plural, Qal active participle with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #340 BDB #33
râ`âh (רָאָה) [pronounced <i>raw-AWH</i> ]	<i>to see, to look, to look at, to view, to behold; to perceive, to understand, to learn, to know</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #7200 BDB #906
ʿayin (עַיִן) [pronounced <i>ĠAH-yin</i> ]	<i>spring, literal eye(s), spiritual eyes, spring</i>	feminine singular noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5869 (and #5871) BDB #744

**Translation:** ...and my eye has looked upon [or, seen into] my enemies. Here, David looks upon his enemy—not with hatred or bitterness, but in victory. God has delivered David, so that David can look upon his enemy. Another way this can be read is, ...and my eye has seen into my enemies. David can see into his enemy, into his motivation, and fully understand his enemy. God is also allowing David to see his enemies *after* God has dealt with them. David can see what God can and will do to his enemies, that his enemies stand defeated, that David has already been delivered from them—because he can trust in the faithfulness of God. There are several passages which confirm this: *Only with your eyes you shall look and see the reward of the wicked* (Psalm 91:8). *My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants* (Psalm 92:11; see also Psalm 35:21 37:34 58:10 58:11 59:10).

With regards to David's own experience, I think that we have placed this psalm properly in time, so that David has not seen Saul removed from this earth. He does not gaze triumphantly at Saul, or even the Ziphites for that matter. However, this is a principle which is true, and is confirmed for David in 1Sam. 25, where his enemy Nabal will die, even though David does not raise his hand against him.

**Testimony:** I have not seen what God has done to every person who has wronged me; however, I have seen what God has done to some of them, and it is comforting to know that I do not have to ever seek personal revenge against anyone. You have no idea what a timesaver that is—particularly in the realm of mental and emotional energy.

I have spoken negatively about several commentaries. It may be instructive for you to read, for instance, the summary offered by Spurgeon<sup>10</sup> (who is often very helpful):

<sup>9</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*; courtesy of E-sword, Psalm 54:7.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David*; e-Sword, Psalm 54.

## A Devotional Introduction to Psalm 54 by Charles Spurgeon

**Psalm 54:1** - In the deliverance of the saints the honour and power of God are concerned.

- I. Their failure would dishonour both.
- II. Their salvation glorifies both.
- III. Both are immutable, therefore we have a sure plea at all times.

**Psalm 54:2** - Our main concern in prayer.

- I. What is meant by God's hearing prayer.
- II. How we may know that he has done so.
- III. What is to be done when this is doubtful.
- IV. What is due to him when the hearing is given.

**Psalm 54:3** - Strange trials.

- I. They are not altogether strange.
  1. Not so to God.
  2. Not so in the history of the church.
  3. Not so to the provisions of grace wherein they are anticipated.
- II. Wherein they are strange.
  1. They reveal God anew.
  2. Endear forgotten promises.
  3. Train unused graces.
  4. Bring new praises, etc.

**Psalm 54:3** (last clause) - The root of sin: if they remembered his authority they dared not, if they tasted his love they would not, if they were conformed to his nature they could not.

**Psalm 54:4** - A theme for wonder.

1. At his unmerited grace, that he should side with me.
2. At his gracious power, for who can resist him?
3. At his practical help, for he has upheld my soul.

**Psalm 54:6** - We should sacrifice voluntarily, liberally, joyfully, continuously, with pure motive.

**Psalm 54:6** - The goodness of praising the good name.

**Psalm 54:7** (first clause) - The exclamation of the newly-pardoned penitent, the cry of the delivered saint, the song of the ripe Christian, the shout of the glorified believer.

You see, for the most part, Spurgeon has told us essentially nothing about this psalm. My point in offering this is, of the things which I read, I edit out about 95% or more. However, now and again, I come across something which is meaningful and helpful, and that is what I insert.

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