

## 11 March 2018: God's friend, David, describes God as his protector.

Can you guess in which book of the Bible we might find these words?

Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;  
Protect me from those who rise up against me.  
Deliver me from those who work evil;  
From the bloodthirsty.  
Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city.  
But I will sing of your might;  
I'll sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning.  
For you have been a fortress for me  
And a refuge in the day of my distress.

These words come from the book of Psalms. That is a collection of poems. (*Let them look up how many there are*) About 50 of these were written by David at various stages in his life. Unusually, we know exactly what his problem was when he wrote this Psalm, number 59!

The king of Israel at that time was called Saul. He had started off well, but he pretty soon got out of step with God and began to think of himself as his own boss. This wasn't good for the people, and so God told him and Samuel, the prophet that it was time to choose a new king.

The person God chose was the youngest son of a man called Jesse. His name was David and he had 7 older brothers and a couple of older sisters too! He was so unimportant that his job was simply to look after his father's sheep. A shepherd's life was pretty tough! Apart from having to cope with the heat and the cold, a shepherd sometimes had to rescue his animals which had fallen down cliffs and he sometimes had to battle wild animals which tried to grab the lambs. But God was at work, preparing him to be king.

Even after David discovered that he was to be the next king, David went back to the fields with his sheep. Now he had even more to think about and to learn about what God wanted him to do and how God wanted him to live. He left the future to God.

Then, when the time was right, God organised that he was sent to take bread and cheese to his older brothers on the battle field. He arrived just in time to hear the giant, Goliath, challenge God's people. You know the story. When no-one was brave enough to fight Goliath told Saul (1 Sam 17:37) that, "*The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will save me from the hand of the Philistine!*" David took Goliath on, without even a sword or a shield for he knew that God would protect him. And God did.

But, although that victory made David's name, it also created a lot of trouble. David was young and brave and good-looking and became a type of superhero. If they had them in those days, the girls would have decorated their bedrooms with newspaper cuttings about him! David would certainly have trended on Twitter! Saul couldn't stand this, especially as

his own ratings were going down. The more Saul realised that David was special, the more jealous he became of him.

The first signs of Saul's hatred came when he threw his javelin at David who was playing the harp for him! Saul would have killed him if God had not protected him.

Then Saul posted guards outside his house at night so they could kill David as he came out in the morning.

David knew that he was under threat. See how he describes his enemies in this Psalm as "wild dogs" roaming about barking and growling and biting. They do and say what they like and think no-one will stop them. Yet David imagines (v 8) that God is "laughing" at them, saying "You may think you can hurt my David, but you aren't as strong as you think!"

David knows that only God is able to overpower these enemies so he doesn't attack them; he leaves them to God. In v 9 he describes God as his "strength" and his "fortress" or castle! And later he says that God is his "refuge" or hiding place. So David wasn't panicking!

David wrote this Psalm to celebrate how God helped him on this occasion. God used David's wife, Michal, to protect him. Even though she was Saul's daughter, Michal loved David enough to help him. She warned David that if he didn't escape he would soon be killed.

First, she first helped David escape out of a window. Possibly she held a rope for him to climb down. Then, after curling the rope up, she put an idol in David's bed. She added a net of goat's hair so everyone thought it was a real person sleeping there! Then she told the servants and the soldiers that David was sick and that he mustn't be disturbed. The soldiers hung around for a couple of days waiting. Yet, all this time, David was running as far away from Saul as he could! When Saul began to get impatient and sent the soldiers to check on David, they discovered that he was gone!

That escape was the start of many years of rough living. Camping is great when one knows one has clean sheets and a decent bed to come home to. But for years, David existed as a fugitive, camping out in all weathers, being hounded from one spot to the other. At times we know from his poems that David felt miserable, but he never doubted that God had a plan for his life and that God would protect him. And sure enough God provided David with friends and food and safety. And, when Saul died in battle, David became a great king.

But David was not perfect. He had a man killed so he could marry his wife; he didn't discipline his children and he even disobeyed God directly at times. But he hated to disappoint God and he really loved God, so God forgave him and continued to protect him.

And throughout his life he wrote poems about how he felt. Those poems are still favourites. Not because the words are so beautiful, although they are! Not because they have been put to music and people like the tunes. They are favourites because they remind us that God is there for us too. God will protect us just as he protected David.