

Tehillim / Psalms 54 | ספר תהילים נד

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Faith, Faithfulness, and Righteousness Living

This week's study is from *Tehillim / Psalms 54:1-7*, the psalm opens saying, א למנצח בנגינת משפיל For the choir director; on stringed instruments. *A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, "Is not David hiding himself among us?" (NASB)* The first two verses from the Masoretic Text have become the title for our English translations of *Tehillim / Psalms 54*. David says, ג אלהים בשמך הושיעני ובגבורתך תדינני: *Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your power. (NASB)* How does God save David by His name? What is it about the Name of God that saves? He expects the Lord to move in His power according to His name. He is seeking the Lord for an answer to his prayer, ד אלהים שמע תפלתי האזינה לאמרי-פי: *Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. (NASB)* David's case is based on the enemy who surrounds, ה וקמו עלי ועריצים בקשו נפשי לא שמו אלהים לנגדם סלה: *For strangers have risen against me And violent men have sought my life; They have not set God before them. Selah. (NASB)* Notice how those who surround David to take his life do not set the Lord God before them. What does it mean to set God before us? David continues saying, ו הנה אלהים עזר לי אדני בסמכי נפשי: *Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. (NASB)* How does the Lord sustain the soul? Notice how David calls upon the Lord and then states, ז ישוב [ישיב] הרע לשררי באמתך הצמיחם: *He will recompense the evil to my foes; Destroy them in Your faithfulness. (NASB)* He asks the Lord to repay his enemies according to their wickedness, and David asks the Lord to do these things based on His faithfulness. He does not say "Based upon my own faithfulness," but rather, based on God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is what brought the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Man always fails, the Lord always comes through on His promises. David concludes his Psalm saying, ח בנדבה אזבחה לך אודה שמך יהוה כי-טוב: *Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good. 54:6 For He has delivered me from all trouble, And my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies. (NASB)* David says that he will willingly give sacrifices to the Lord. What kind of sacrifices are David referring to? David attributes his victory over his enemies to the Lord God Almighty. He looks with satisfaction upon his enemies. Obviously, this must be a reference to his victory overcoming his enemies, victory generally resulted in the death of an enemy. Is it OK to look with satisfaction over our enemies and their destruction? Under what circumstances can we have this approach to our attitude towards the unrighteous who seek our destruction? Is David teaching us that it is OK to pray for the destruction of our enemies?

עברית Hebrew	ארמי Aramaic	ελληνικός Greek
ספר תהלים פרק נד	ספר טוביה פרק נד	ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 54
א למנצח בנגינת משפיל לְדוֹד:	א לשבחא על תושבחתא שכלא טבא	54:1 εις το τέλος εν υμνοις συνεσεως τῷ Δαυιδ εν τῷ ελθειν τοις Ζιφαιουσι και ειπειν τῷ σαουλ ουκ ιδου Δαυιδ κερυπται πα ημιν ο θεος εν τῷ ονοματι σου σωσον με και εν τη δυναμει σου κρινον με
ב כבוא הזיפים ויאמרו לשאול הלא-דוד מסתתר עמנו: ג אלהים בשמך הושיעני ובגבורתך תדינני: ד אלהים שמע תפלתי האזינה לאמרי-פי:	ב כד אתו אנשי זיף ואמרו לשאול הלא דוד מטמר גבן: ג אלהא בשמך פרוק יתי ובכח ברוח יהוה קבל גבורתך דון יתי: ד צלותי אצית למימר פומי:	54:2 ο θεος εισακουσον της προσευχης μου ενωτισαι τα ρηματα του στοματος μου

<p>ה כִּי זָרִים קָמוּ עָלַי וְעָרִיצִים בִּקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי לֹא שָׁמוּ אֱלֹהִים לְנַגְּדָם סֵלָה: ו הִנֵּה אֱלֹהִים עֲזָר לִי אֲדַנִּי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי: ז יָשׁוּב [יָשׁוּב] הֲרַע לְשַׁרְרֵי בְּאַמְתָּהּ הַצְּמִיתָם: ח בְּנִדְרֵי בָּהּ אֲזַבְחָה-לָּהּ אוֹדָה שְׁמָהּ יְהוָה כִּי- טוֹב: ט כִּי מִכָּל-צָרָה הֲצִילָנִי וּבְאֵיבֵי רָצְתָה עֵינָי:</p>	<p>ה ארום נוכראין זידונין קמון עלי וע- לימין תבעו נפשי לא שוו אלהא לקב- להון לעלמין: ו הא יהוה אלהא סעיד לי יהוה בסמכי נפשי: ז יתוב בישא למעיקי בהמנותך אמאיך יתהון: ח בניכסתא אדבח קדמך אודי שמך יהוה ארום טב: ט ארום מכל עקא פצי יתי ובבעלי דבבי חמת עיני נקמתא:</p>	<p>54:3 ὅτι ἀλλότριοι ἐπανεστήσαν ἐπ' ἐμέ καὶ κραταιοὶ ἐζήτησαν τὴν ψυχὴν μου οὐ προέθεντο τὸν θεὸν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν διάψαλμα 54:4 ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς βοηθεῖ μοι καὶ ὁ κύριος ἀντιλήμπτωρ τῆς ψυχῆς μου 54:5 ἀποστρέψει τὰ κακὰ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς μου ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ σου ἐξολέθρευσον αὐτοῦς 54:6 ἐκουσίως θύσω σοι ἐξομολογήσομαι τῷ ὀνόματί σου κύριε ὅτι ἀγαθόν 54:7 ὅτι ἐκ πάσης θλίψεως ἐρρύσω με καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐχθροῖς μου ἐπεΐδεν ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς μου</p>
<p>Tehillim / Psalms 54 For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, “Is not David hiding himself among us?” 54:1 Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your power. 54:2 Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. 54:3 For strangers have risen against me And violent men have sought my life; They have not set God before them. Selah. 54:4 Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. 54:5 He will recompense the evil to my foes; Destroy them in Your faithfulness. 54:6 Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good. 54:7 For He has delivered me from all trouble, And my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies. (NASB)</p>	<p>Toviyah / Psalms Chapter 54 54:1 For praise, with a hymn. Good teaching composed by David. 54:2 When the men of Ziph came and said to Saul, “Is not David hiding with us?” 54:3 O God, by your name redeem me, and by the strength of your might judge me. 54:4 O Lord, accept my prayer; listen to the utterance of my mouth. 54:5 For arrogant men have risen against me, and powerful men have sought my life; they have not put God before them forever. 54:6 Behold, the Lord is my helper, the Lord is among the supports of my soul. 54:7 May evil return to those who oppress me; in your faithfulness bring them low. 54:8 With an offering I will sacrifice in your presence; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good. 54:9 For he has delivered me from every trouble; and my eye has seen vengeance against my enemies. (EMC)</p>	<p>Psalmoi / Psalms 54 For the end, among Hymns of instruction by David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Lo, is not David hid with us? 54:1 Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy might. 54:2 O God, hear my prayer; hearken to the words of my mouth. 54:3 For strangers have risen up against me, and mighty men have sought my life: they have not set God before them. Pause. 54:4 For lo! God assists me; and the Lord is the helper of my soul. 54:5 He shall return evil to mine enemies; utterly destroy them in thy truth. 54:6 I will willingly sacrifice to thee: I will give thanks to thy name, O Lord; for it is good. 54:7 For thou hast delivered me out of all affliction, and mine eye has seen my desire upon mine enemies. (LXX)</p>

This week’s study is from *Tehillim / Psalms 54:1-7*, the psalm opens saying, א לְמַנְצֵחַ בְּנִגְיַנֹת מְשֻׁכִּיל וְאֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לְדָוִד: ב כָּבוֹא הַזִּיפִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשָׂאוֹל הֲלֹא-דָוִד מְסֻתָּר עִמָּנוּ: *For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, “Is not David hiding himself among us?” (NASB)* It is interesting that the first two verses from the Masoretic Text have become the title for our English translations of *Tehillim / Psalms 54*. The title to the Psalm states that this is for stringed instruments, for music. The title continues saying this is the wisdom (Maskil) of David, when the Ziphites came and told Saul that David had hid himself among them. The first thing that catches our attention is the word “*HaZiphim*,” “*The Ziphites*” (הַזִּיפִים). Who are the Ziphites? Performing a search on the word ziphim or ha’ziphim, as it is spelled הַזִּיפִים produces only one result, *Tehillim / Psalms 54:2*. There is also a defective spelling זִפִּים that produces additional results from *1 Samuel 23:19, and 26:1*.

1 Samuel 23:19

23:19 Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding with us in the

strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? (NASB)

יט וַיֵּעָלוּ זִפְתִּים אֶל-שָׂאוּל הַגִּבְעָתָה לְאמֹר הֲלוֹא דָוִד מְסֻתָּתָר עִמָּנוּ בְּמַצְדּוֹת בְּחַרְשָׁה בְּגִבְעַת הַחֲכִילָה
אֲשֶׁר מִיַּמִּין הַיְשִׁימוֹן:

1 Samuel 26:1

26:1 Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is not David hiding on the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?’ (NASB)

א וַיָּבֹאוּ הַזִּפְתִּים אֶל-שָׂאוּל הַגִּבְעָתָה לְאמֹר הֲלוֹא דָוִד מְסֻתָּתָר בְּגִבְעַת הַחֲכִילָה עַל פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימוֹן:

David escaped from Keilah (Citadel) which was a city in the lowlands of Judah (*Joshua 15:44*). According to *1 Samuel*, David rescued the city from the attack of the Philistines (*1 Samuel 23:1-8*) however, the inhabitants proved unfaithful to him, in that they sought to deliver him up to Saul (*1 Samuel 23:12*). The Scriptures say that he and his men “*departed from Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go.*” They fled first to Hareth Hill, about 3 miles to the east, and then through Hebron to Ziph as the Scriptures say, “*And David was in the wilderness of Ziph, in a wood*” (*1 Samuel 23:15*). This was the location where Jonathan sought him out, “*and strengthened his hand in God.*” This was the last conversation between David and Jonathan (*1 Samuel 23:16-18*) as it is recorded in the bible.

Escaping from Keilah, before Saul could gather his forces to march against him, David was left with no choice but to return to the wild hills, valleys and woodlands of southern Judah. It was in the mountain territories that David found the best protection; but finding sufficient food for his soldiers was difficult there. Therefore, David relocated closer to the town of Ziph. The woods was most likely thick and few people passed through them, providing an opportunity for David and his men to make camp, the purpose was so very few people would know of their exact location. In addition to this, as compared to the mountains, there was the possibility of catching game for food and even farming a little in the small clearings that were found amid the trees of the forest. The town of Ziph was close and having saved Ziph from the Philistines would make for a great opportunity to live in relative safety for a short period of time. They could go to Ziph to do their trading, and there was the possibility of having some fellowship with the people of their own nation. David would have undoubtedly offered protection and assistance to the people of the territory like he did to Nabal, something that is consistent with David’s character. The Aramaic Targum and the Septuagint state the same thing, that the Ziphites come and revealed the location of David to Saul.

Toviyah / Psalms Chapter 54

54:1 For praise, with a hymn. Good teaching composed by David. 54:2 When the men of Ziph came and said to Saul, “Is not David hiding with us?”

א לְשִׁבְחָה עַל תּוֹשִׁבְחָתָא שְׁכֵלָא טְבָא עַל יַד דָּוִד: ב כִּד אַתּוּ אַנְשֵׁי זִיף וְאִמְרוּ לְשָׂאוּל הֲלֹא דָוִד
מְסֻתָּתָר עִמָּנוּ:

Psalmoi / Psalms 54

For the end, among Hymns of instruction by David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Lo, is not David hid with us?

54:1 εἰς τὸ τέλος ἐν ὕμνοις συνέσεως τῷ Δαυὶδ ἐν τῷ ἔλθεῖν τοὺς Ζιφᾶιους καὶ εἰπεῖν τῷ σαουλ οὐκ ἴδου Δαυὶδ κέκρυπται παρῆμῖν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου σῶσόν με καὶ ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου κρῖνόν με

The people of Ziph betrayed David and told Saul where he was located. As a result of these things that

transpired in David's life, he composed this psalm.

David opens with a request to God (Elohim) saying, אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁמְךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וּבְגִבּוֹרֶתְךָ תְּדַיְנֵנִי : 54:1 *Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your power. (NASB)* How does God save David by His name? What is it about the Name of God that saves? He expects the Lord to move in His power according to His name. How does the Lord move in His name? What does that mean, to move in the name?

According to the Scriptures, God's name is the manifestation of His character, the sum of His revealed attributes. The Psalmist can appeal to it, for He has declared that it is His will to save those who put their trust in Him. According to *Isaiah 48:9-11*, the Lord God says, "For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another." Isaiah states that the Lord's affection towards His people is to bring glory to His name or for His name's sake. In the Apostolic Writings, the Lord God chose His people for His glory, "1:4 He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace." (*Ephesians 1:4-6, 12, 14, NASB*) The Lord created us for his glory, as we read in *Isaiah 43:6-7*, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory." The Scriptures say that God called Israel for His glory, in *Isaiah 49:3*, that he makes the whole house of Judah to cling to Him for praise and Glory of God (*Jeremiah 13:11*). The Psalms say (*Tehillim / Psalms 106:7-8*) that "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works . . . but rebelled by the Sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power." The apostle Paul said that the Lord raised up Pharaoh to show His power and to glorify His name in *Romans 9:17*, and that the Lord defeated Pharaoh at the Red Sea to show His glory (*Shemot / Exodus 14:4, 18*). The Lord God spared Israel in the wilderness for the glory of His name (*Ezekiel 20:14*), and the Lord gave victory over Canaan for the glory of His name (*2 Samuel 7:23, Who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods?*). The Lord saved Jerusalem for His name's sake, for the glory of His name, the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake (*1 Samuel 12:20-22*). He saves and defends Jerusalem for the sake of His servant David (*2 Kings 19:34, 20:6*). We are told that the Lord also restored Israel from exile for the glory of His name according to *Ezekiel 36:22-23, 32*. According to the Apostolic Writings, Yeshua sought the glory of his Father in all that he did (*John 7:18*). Yeshua instructed us to do good works for the purpose of bringing glory to God (see *Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12*). Yeshua also warned that by not seeking the glory of God, faith is impossible in *John 5:44*. Yeshua says that our Father in heaven answers prayer so that He is glorified (*John 14:13*). Yeshua also endured the last hours here on earth suffering for the Glory of the Lord God in heaven (*John 12:27-28*). Isaiah told us that the Lord forgives sin for His own sake (*Isaiah 43:25*), that the Lord pardons sins for His name's sake (*Tehillim / Psalms 25:11*). Why do you think that the Lord God pardons and forgives sins for His name's sake? The Holy Spirit of God is also given to bring glory to the Son of God (*John 16:14*), and the Lord Himself instructs us to do all things for His glory (*1 Corinthians 10:31*). The apostle Peter tells us to serve God in a way that glorifies His name (*1 Peter 4:11*), and Paul says that Yeshua fills us with fruits of righteousness for God's glory (*Philippians 1:9, 11*). According to *Romans 1:22-23*, all are under judgment for dishonoring the glory of God. King Herod was struck dead because he did not give glory to God (*Acts 12:23*). Yeshua returns again for the glory of God and in the glory of His Father (*2 Thessalonians 1:9-10*). Yeshua ultimately desires for us to see the glory of God's name (*John 17:24*) and even in wrath the Lord's aim is to make known the wealth of his glory (*Romans 9:22-23*). We know according to the prophet Habakkuk that God's plan is to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory (*Habakkuk 2:14*). Even at the end of the bible, in the book of Revelation, we are told that the glory of God replaces the sun (*Revelation 21:23*), that His name and His glory provide us with a future expectation of His reshaping and restructuring the new creation into something that we can not even imagine. As can be seen in this brief summary on the name and the glory of God, David expects

the Lord to move in His power according to His name. This concept is very biblically based, God's name is the manifestation of His character, and the sum of His revealed attributes. So when David asks the Lord to save him by His name, the name of God is connected to the Power of God and in the way in which the Lord has revealed Himself according to the Torah, and throughout all of Scripture. It is obvious that David is taking a Torah centric position to his understanding of God's love, who He is, and His saving power to deliver even in the midst of impossible circumstances, just like David finds himself in running from Saul in the forest of Ziph.

David seeks the Lord to answer his prayer saying, **אֱלֹהִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי הָאֲזִינָה לְאִמְרֵי-פִי: 54:2 Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. (NASB)** He asks the Lord to give an ear to his words which means to listen to the words that he is saying. David's case is based on the enemy who is persistent to surround and destroy him, **כִּי זָרִים | קָמוּ עָלַי וְעָרִיצִים בִּקְשׂוּ נַפְשִׁי לֹא שָׁמוּ אֱלֹהִים לְנַגְדָם סָלָה: 54:3 For strangers have risen against me And violent men have sought my life; They have not set God before them. Selah. (NASB)** Notice how the Scriptures say, those who surround David to take his life do not set the Lord God before them. What does it mean to set God before us? This is an interesting topic, and we can gain some insights from the Torah and Parashat Noach (*Bereshit / Genesis 6:9-11:32*).

The opening verses of Parashat Noach tell us that the Lord saw all of the wickedness of mankind on the face of the earth (**וַיִּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יֶצֶר מַחְשֹׁבֶת לְבוֹ רָק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם: 1 וַיִּנְחָם יְהוָה כִּי-)** **(עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֵל-לְבוֹ evil (Bereshit / Genesis 6:9).** It grieved the Lord that He had made man. As a result, the Lord was going to bring a great flood to destroy all life having breath from the face of the earth. God instructs Noah to build an ark and then Noah, his family, two of every unclean animal, and 7 pairs of every clean animal enter into the ark. In *Bereshit / Genesis 9:11* the Lord says **וַהֲקִמְתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם "I establish my covenant with you,"** declaring that He will establish His covenant again with man. He places His bow as a reminder of this covenant to not destroy the earth by water (flood) again. The interesting topic about this week's portion is found in the opening words that describe Noah as a righteous man. The Scriptures describe Moshe as a righteous man. The question is, based upon the generation that he lived, how righteous would one have to be in order to excel beyond the generations of Noah? How righteous was Noah and are there different levels of righteousness?

Bereshit / Genesis 6:9

6:9 These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. (NASB)

ספר בראשית פרק 1

ט אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו... אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלְּךְ-נֹחַ:

The question that presents itself with regard to the righteousness of Noah, *"Are there really degrees in truth and righteousness?"* If you were asked this question, how would you respond? Yes, No, Maybe? In Hebrew a *"righteous one"* is called a *"Tsadik"* (צדיק, singular, *"Tsadikim,"* צדיקים, plural). According to Jewish tradition, the Tsadik is a title given to person who is considered righteous, such people as Biblical figures and later the rabbis of blessed memory. The root of the word *"Tsadik,"* is צדק *tzedek*, which means *"justice"* or *"righteousness,"* and is also the root for *"tzedakah"* meaning *"charity,"* or literally *"righteousness."* The term Tsadik, *"righteous,"* and its associated meanings, are well developed in Rabbinic thought which may also be compared to the Talmudic concept of the *"khasid"* (*"pious one,"* from the root *khesed* חסד). The question is though whether the concept of different degrees of righteousness is really biblical? Well, interestingly enough, Yeshua had something to say concerning levels of righteousness according to *Matthew 5:18-20*.

Matthew 5:18-20

5:18 'For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 5:19 'Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 'For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (NASB)

Yeshua commented to his disciples saying, “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the pharisees.” This statement is significant because, how can one’s righteousness surpass or exceed that of another? Can a person be two or three times more correct than a disagreeing party? Are there degrees in truth and righteousness? Well, according to the Scriptures it appears that not all righteous persons are equal. There does appear to be different individuals with differing levels of holiness and righteousness. Based upon the Torah portion, here in Parashat Noah, the text appears to call our attention to the righteousness of individuals in the narrative, especially in the cases of Noah and Abraham. We can see this if we compare the different ways in which the Torah describes both Noah and Abraham according to *Bereshit / Genesis 6:9 and 17:1*.

Bereshit / Genesis 6:9

6:9 These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. (NASB)

ספר בראשית פרק ו

ט אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו...אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ-נֹחַ:

Bereshit / Genesis 17:1

17:1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. (NASB)

ספר בראשית פרק יז

א וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן-תְּשָׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתִּשְׁעַ שְׁנָיִם וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי-אֱלֹהֵי הַתְּהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָמִים:

Based upon these Scriptures, the Torah states that Noah “walked with God” (אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ-נֹחַ) whereas for Abraham, we are told the Lord speaks to Abraham and says “Walk before Me” (הִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי). The difference here is that Noah walked with God, while Abraham walked before God. What is the difference between walking with God and walking Before God? The Torah also tells us the following in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 13:5*, | וְהַנְּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ חֵלֶם הַחֲלוֹם הֵהוּא יִמָּת כִּי דָבַר-סָרָה עַל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם | 13:5 מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהַפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים לְהַדִּיחֶךָ מִן-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֵלְכֶת בָּהּ וּבַעֲרַף הָרַע מִקִּרְבְּךָ: 'But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (NASB) In Deuteronomy, we find this concept of walking according to “the way the Lord commanded,” which is synonymous to walking after the Lord your God. So within these three scripture verses, there is “walking with God,” “walking before God,” and “walking after God.” How do all of these things fit together? The answer may be found in the Torah descriptions of righteousness. Thinking about righteousness, as you know, righteousness is not an instantaneous thing that occurs in our lives, righteousness and righteous living actually takes time to develop in our lives. For example, after Adam had sinned, we see the onset of a natural order of decay and death. There was not an instantaneous shift in the

world to death, it was more gradual and we can see this based upon the life spans of those recorded in the book of Genesis, where each subsequent person lived shorter and shorter lives. Similarly, the Lord did not seek to correct the world instantaneously, rather, mankind was given instructions to obey the word of the Lord. The significance of these things is in the walk of the righteous, it is a slow, gradual, and steady moral progression that occurs in our lives. For example, when we first come to faith in the Messiah, we did not instantaneously walk perfect before God and I do not think we will ever walk perfectly before the Lord in this life. However, we do strive to do so with each day we live here on earth, for the glory of God.

The rabbis of blessed memory (Chachameinu Zichronam Liv'racha, לברכה) also asked the same questions regarding Noah, righteousness, and the generation that he lived in according to Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 30, Part 9 (מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ל סימן ט).

Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 30, Part 9

In his generations. Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah differed. Rabbi Judah said, Only in his generations was he a righteous man (by compromise); had he flourished in the generation of Moshe or Samuel, he would not have been called righteous, in the street of the totally blind, the one-eyed man is called clear sighted, and the infant is called a scholar. It is as if a man who had a wine vault opened one barrel and found it vinegar; another found it vinegar; the third, however, he found turning sour. It is turning, people said to him. Is there any better here? He retorted. Similarly, In his generations he was a righteous man. Rabbi Nehemiah said, If he was righteous in his generation, how much more so had he lived in the age of Moshe. He might be compared to a tightly closed phial of perfume lying in a graveyard, which nevertheless gave forth a fragrant odor; how much more then if it were outside the graveyard.

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ל סימן ט

ט בדורותיו, רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה, רבי יהודה אמר בדורותיו היה צדיק, הא אלו היה בדורו של משה או בדורו של שמואל לא היה צדיק, בשוק סמיא צווחין לעווירא סגי נהור, משל לאחד שהיה לו מרתף אחד של יין, פתח הבית אחת ומצאה של חומץ, שניה כן, שלישיית ומצאה קוסס, אמרין ליה קוסס הוא, אמר להון ואית הכא טב מינה א"ל לא, כך בדורותיו היה צדיק הא אלו היה בדורו של משה או בדורו של שמואל לא היה צדיק, רבי נחמיה אמר ומה אם בדורותיו היה צדיק, אלו היה בדורו של משה או בדורו של שמואל על אחת כמה וכמה, משל לצלוחית של אפרסמון מוקפת צמיד פתיל, ומונחת בין הקברות, והיה ריחה נודף, ואלו היה חוץ לקברות עאכ"ו, משל לבתולה שהיתה שרויה בשוק של זונות ולא יצא עליה שם רע, אלו היתה בשוקן של כשרות על אחת כמה וכמה, כך ומה אם בדורותיו היה צדיק אלו היה בדורו של משה או בדורו של שמואל על אחת כמה וכמה.

According to the midrash, rabbi Judah said that it was only in his generation that he (Noah) was considered a righteous man. Noah was a righteous man by compromise. What does it mean “by compromise?” He says that if he had lived in the time of Moshe, he would not have been called righteous. He makes a comparison to the street that contains men who are totally blind. A one eyed man is called clear sighted, and an infant a scholar. Another parable that is used is that of a wine vault, one barrel is vinegar, another is vinegar, the third is found turning sour. The idea is that in comparison to his generation, it did not take much to be considered a righteous man. Rabbi Nehemiah said on the other hand that he was in fact a righteous man in his generation. The comparison that is made is to a perfume bottle laying in the midst of a graveyard. Though there is death all around, within is a fragrant odor. The concept here is taken from the Torah regarding Noah who “walked with God” verses Abraham who “walked before God.” Was Noah only as good as the standards of his time? Does the standard that we live by become flexible depending upon the generation that we live in? Taking the example from Noah, his generation was very wicked, so much so the Lord destroyed all life that had breath from the face of the earth. Yeshua spoke of the last days before his return, *Matthew 24:37*

and *Luke 17:26*, that it would be as in the days of Noah. Destruction would come upon the people without notice. Could Yeshua also have been referring to the state of wickedness in these last days also? By simple observation, there are cultural indicators of an increase in wickedness, e.g. homosexuality, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, suicide, rape, pregnancy, robbery, and assault, even terrorism, and mass murder, rumors of war and wars, etc. Based upon these indicators, the standard of justice, holiness, and righteousness in our culture is waning. Are the rabbis saying that righteousness is relative to a persons cultural setting? Should our righteousness be judged based upon the state of the culture today as compared to 100, 200, or 300 years ago?

Noah, according to the Scriptures, was just and good according to the standards that were prevalent in his day. For this reason the Torah emphasizes that Noah was “*faultless in his generation.*” His level of righteousness was antithetical to the moral expectations of his generation. Abraham on the other hand sought to proclaim righteousness and the one true God to all the world. According to the Rabbis, in *Talmud Bavli Yoma 28b*, Abraham walked before God preparing the world to be ready for the greatest enlightenment of all, the giving of the Torah. As a result of this interpretation on Abraham’s life, the rabbis say that Abraham fulfilled the Torah in his proclaiming righteousness to the world. Abraham’s righteousness was the result of his love and faith in the Lord and His promises. This is exactly what the apostles taught in the Apostolic Writings. The Apostle Paul said the following concerning righteousness in *Romans 10:5-6*:

Romans 10:5-11

10:5 For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. 10:6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), 10:7 or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).’ 10:8 But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 10:11 For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ (NASB)

Paul makes a clear distinction between the “*righteousness that is by the Law*” and the “*righteousness that is by faith.*” The difference between these two types of righteousness is found within this week’s Torah portion and the comparison between Noah and Abraham and the concept of having faith, and living in faithfulness. We have faith in the Lord, believing in the Messiah Yeshua for righteousness, and by our faith, we live faithful lives according to the righteousness that is described in the Torah. Faith always proceeds faithful living. In the Torah portion, we are not told that Noah was given a set of commands to obey. Therefore, when the Scriptures say “*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God,*” Noah walked in righteousness and justice because he loved the Lord God Almighty and believed in Him. Similarly with Abraham, he was not given a command to proclaim righteousness to the nations; his proclamation of righteousness to the world was based upon his love and faith in the Lord in heaven. The apostle Paul agrees with this in *Romans 4:1-3* when he states his understanding of Abraham, that Abraham was not justified by works, he was declared righteous through faith. Paul said, “*What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” (*Romans 4:1-3*) These men are our examples, to live our lives by faith, because we love the Lord and choose to walk in His ways. According to the Torah, God’s ways are peace, love, mercy, righteousness, justice, holiness, and innocence. We are to seek the righteousness of God and His Messiah Yeshua, we are also to have lives that produce these fruits of love, mercy, justice, holiness, and innocence. The level of righteousness according to the Torah is not supposed to change with regard to the extent of wickedness of a given generation. God’s righteousness and standard for living is eternal. With the help of Yeshua the Messiah and the Holy Spirit of God, we are given the power to walk in His ways, to abide in the

Messiah (in Christ), even in the midst of an evil generation.

In addition to this, with regard to walking with God, before Him, and after Him, Moshe walked with God, before God, and after God. He functioned as a prototypical Messiah, (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 18*); it was through him we received the Torah from Sinai. In the same way, Yeshua walked in all three and yet did not sin, he was perfect. We were given the Torah from Sinai by Moshe; God’s Torah was written upon our hearts by the Messiah Yeshua (Jeremiah 31). The conclusion is that as our example, we are to follow in the footsteps of Yeshua, walking before God, with God, and following after God according to His commands. In doing these things, we will live lives that are pleasing to our Father in heaven.

David continues saying, הַגִּיהָ אֱלֹהִים עֵזֶר לִי אֲדֹנָי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי: 1 54:4 *Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. (NASB)* How does the Lord sustain the soul? Notice how David calls upon the Lord and then states, יָשׁוּב [יָשׁוּב] הָרַע לְשָׂרְרֵי בְּאַמְתָּהּ הַצְּמִיתָם: 2 54:5 *He will recompense the evil to my foes; Destroy them in Your faithfulness. (NASB)* He asks the Lord to repay his enemies according to their wickedness, and David asks the Lord to do these things based on His faithfulness. He does not say “Based upon my own faithfulness,” but rather, based on God’s faithfulness. God’s faithfulness is what brought the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Man always fails, the Lord always comes through on His promises.

In Hebrew, faith or faithfulness is expressed by the word “*Emunah*” (אמונה). Studying the word *Emunah* we learn that it is about holding steady, holding firm, or holding to what is true. We hold to the faithfulness of God because He is true, steady, and firm. The concept of “*faith*” (*Emunah*) has classically been held to be a spiritual, ethereal idea or proposition that one gives one’s self to. If we take this approach to *Emunah*, we get only half of the picture since faith is more than a proposition or mental exercise, it is a commitment to a promise, like the patriarchs and prophets in the Tanach, we live according to God’s commands, and trust in God’s promises. Thus, biblical faith is coupled with being faithful. Take for example from the Torah, in *Bereshit / Genesis 15:6* says, “*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*” (וְהֵאֱמַן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה:) (1) This verse is very familiar and is the verse that the apostle Paul quotes in *Romans 4:3*. The word used in Parashat Lech Lecha is “*he’emin*” (הֵאֱמַן) which can be translated as “*believe, trust, or have faith.*” Derived from the word *he’emin* is the word *emunah*, meaning faithfulness and trust. The Hebrew Scriptures convey the idea of firmness, steadfastness, stability, steadiness, reliability, and support. One example may be taken from *Shemot / Exodus 17:12* which says the following:

Shemot / Exodus 17:11-12

17:11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 17:12 But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. (NASB)

א וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִגִּיחַ יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר עַמְלֵק: יב וַיְדִי מֹשֶׁה כַּבְּדִים וַיִּקְחוּ-אֶבֶן וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ תַּחְתָּיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וַאֲהֲרֹן וְחֹר וַתִּמְכוּ בְּיָדָיו מִזֶּה אֶחָד וּמִזֶּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי נִדְּיוֹ אֲמוּנָה עַד-בֹּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

Note how the Scriptures say that Moshe’s hands grew tired, they took a stone, put it under him and he sat on it, and Aaron and Hur held his hands up on each side of him so that his hand remained “*Emunah*” (אמונה) steady till sunset. Notice how the word *Emunah* is translated in *Shemot / Exodus 17:12*. This verse provides us with a picture of *Emunah*, of being steady, steadfast, firm, unmoving, upholding, etc. The children of Israel won the battle so long as Moshe held his hands steady, because his faith strengthened their faith. How important is a father or husbands faith in strengthening the faith of his family? *Emunah* implies perseverance and commitment because the Lord commands and promises we in turn are to trust and obey. The word *Emunah* is attributed to the Lord Himself. Or our faith begins by looking to the Lord God in heaven and His faithfulness, and the Messiah Yeshua whose faithfulness took him to the cross for our salvation.

We also learn from Parashat Ha'azinu, that *Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:4*. "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." Based on this Scripture, the Lord is as firm as a Rock. Note how the Septuagint translates Tzur (Rock) as Theos (God) in Parashat Ha'azinu. The rabbis who translated the Septuagint understood the Rock as a reference to the Lord God Almighty Himself. Like a rock, the Lord endures, stands firm, and can be trusted. *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:9* states 7:9 "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him." (NASB) The Lord demonstrates His emunah, He is the faithful God who keeps His promises and His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him. David assures us in *Tehillim / Psalms 145:13* that "The LORD is faithful to all His promises." The apostle John wrote in *Revelation 3:14* that "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness? Yeshua the Messiah! Indeed Yeshua is faithful, he is solid, unmoving, and this is illustrated in the word "Amen" which is derived from the word Emunah for faith and faithfulness. When we say Amen we are affirming and declaring what we are praying for. Note what the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in *2 Corinthians 1:20* "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Messiah. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Messiah." (NASB) Paul understood the meaning of Amen, to stand firm, to believe in faith and then walk in that faith. *Habakkuk 2:4* declares, "the righteous will by faith (emunah)" The Lord is looking for people of Emunah. Note the following verses from Proverbs and Matthew.

Mishley / Proverbs 20:6

20:6 Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man? (NASB, 1
 רב-אדם יקרא איש חסדו ואיש אמונים מי ימצא:

Matthew 7:20-24

7:20 'So then, you will know them by their fruits. 7:21 'Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter 7:22 'Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 7:23 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' 7:24 'Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. (NASB)

What exactly is Yeshua looking for? Will he find faith on the earth? He says plainly what he wants to find in *Matthew 7:24*, that hearing the word of God one puts the word of God into practice. Note how Yeshua says this type of man is as one who builds his house upon a Rock. The Rock metaphor is an obvious allusion to Parashat Ha'azinu and the Lord our Rock who is firm, stable, and faithful (Emunah). Yeshua is writing about how our faith is connected to faithfully living out God's truth, faithfully applying God's word to our lives, and faithfully believing in Yeshua the Messiah. Notice how Yeshua is not looking for people who lean upon themselves. This is not a matter of our own strengths. This is a matter of trusting in the Lord, in His strength, and our willingness to put His words into practice and keep putting them into practice even when difficult times come.

David concludes his Psalm saying, ח בנדבה אזבחה-לך אודה שמך יהוה פי-טוב: ט כי מפל-צרה הצילני, 54:6 Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O Lord, for it is good. 54:7 For He has delivered me from all trouble, And my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies. (NASB) David says that he will willingly give sacrifices to the Lord. What kind of sacrifices is David referring to? David attributes his victory over his enemies to the Lord God Almighty. He looks with satisfaction upon his enemies. Obviously, this must be a reference to his victory overcoming his enemies, where victory generally resulted in the death of an enemy. Is it OK to look with satisfaction over our ene-

mies and their destruction? Under what circumstances can we have this approach to our attitude towards the unrighteous who seek our destruction? Is David teaching us that it is OK to pray for the destruction of our enemies? Are you bothered by the prayer that calls for the destruction of our enemies? This sounds a lot like a “*modern moral standpoint*,” regarding the enemy. Let’s take an example from the Talmud regarding praying for the destruction of our enemies.

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 10a

There were certain hooligans who resided in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir, and they caused him much misery and anguish. Once, Rabbi Meir prayed for mercy regarding them, so that they would die.² His wife Beruriah said to him, “What makes you think that such a prayer is permitted? Is it because the verse states³ ‘Let sinners [chataim] cease from the earth’? But is it written ‘chotim’—sinners? Rather it is written ‘chataim’—that which causes one to sin, namely the evil inclination. Furthermore, the end of the verse continues, ‘...and let the wicked be no more.’ Since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men!

The rabbi’s wife concluded, “*pray for them that they should repent, and there will be no more wicked people.*” Note that when we study Yeshua’s teachings from the gospels, we are told to pray for our enemies, not for their destruction. As we can see according to the Talmud, one should not pray for others to be punished, we are to pray for their Teshuvah (repentance), which is consistent with Yeshua’s teaching on praying for our enemies. The difficulty is, according to the psalm, David is doing the exact opposite. The point is that we are to pray for the cessation of sins rather than the punishment of the wicked. In addition to this, it is not wrong to pray for justice with regard to the dealings of the wicked with the righteous. Praying for justice places into God’s hands the work of justice rather than taking matters into our own hands. Based upon the psalms we have studied thus far, David realizes that the wicked fall into their own snares, they fall into the pit they dig for the righteous. Their evil works will lead to their destruction if they do not repent and turn from their evil deeds and turn to the God of Israel. The way in which David seeks for deliverance by the satisfaction of looking upon his enemies, is very likely a pray of repentance for these unrighteous men who pursue him night and day. In similar manner, we should find it pleasing to see our enemy who has repented and puts the Lord God Almighty and His Messiah Yeshua first in their lives. May our prayer always come to this kind of conclusion for the glory of God! Let’s Pray!

Rabbinic Commentary

The Rabbinic Commentary (Midrash) on *Tehillim / Psalms 54* has 3 parts. Reading through the Midrash we will be looking at Part 1, 2, and 3. Let’s begin by outlining *Midrash Tehillim Chapter 54, Part 1, 2, and 3*.

Outline of Midrash Tehillim / Psalms, Chapter 54, Part 1, 2, and 3

Part 1

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the **דיבור המתחיל** (Dibur Hamathil) saying “*For the leader; with stringed music. Maschil of David; when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:1).*”
- The **פתיחה** (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says, if a ruler listens to lies, all his servants are wicked (Mishley / Proverbs 29:12).*”
- The **משל** (mashal) “*the parable*,” goes on to explain the **פתיחה** (Petihta), the rabbis go on to discuss the opening words of the Psalm and with the interpretation of listening to slander.
- The **נמשל** (Nimshal) “*expansion on the parable*” expands upon the **משל** (mashal), the rabbis expand

upon the slanderous counsel by referring to Saul, Doeg, and Nabal.

- The Concluding phrase says “*Therefore, when the Ziphites observed that Saul accepted the others’ slander, they also came, as it is written, The Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:1-2).*”

Part 2

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the דִּבּוּר הַמַּתְחִיל (Dibur Hamathil) saying “*Save me O God, by Your name (Tehillim / Psalms 54:3).*”
- The פְּתִיחָה (Petihta) “*the homiletic introduction*” to the Midrash says “*David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, when a centenarian persecutes a man, the man may complain against him to the prefect, and when the prefect persecutes him, the man may complain against him to the emperor.*”
- The מִשָּׁל (mashal) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*the parable,*” goes on to discuss the one who we make petition to regarding injustice.
- The נִמְשָׁל (Nimshal) “*expansion on the parable*” expands upon the מִשָּׁל (mashal), the rabbis expand upon making petition regarding injustice with a parable, and then later to the situation occurring in David’s life.
- The Concluding phrase says “*And so Judge me by Your strength, that is by the strength of Torah, which says, Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine (Mishley / Proverbs 8:14).*”

Part 3

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the דִּבּוּר הַמַּתְחִיל (Dibur Hamathil) saying “*Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth (Tehillim / Psalms 54:4).*”
- The פְּתִיחָה (Petihta) “*the homiletic introduction*” to the Midrash says “*According to rabbi Hoshai, David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, Doeg came and slandered me, and Saul accepted the slander from him and listened to him.*”
- The מִשָּׁל (mashal) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*the parable,*” goes on to compare these men who bring accusation against David as being cursed.
- The נִמְשָׁל (Nimshal) “*expansion on the parable*” expands upon the מִשָּׁל (mashal), the rabbis expand upon the comparison with asking the question of whether a curse overrules a blessing?
- The Concluding phrase says “*According to rabbi Simeon son of Pazzi, David replied, When I was in the womb of my mother, Ethan and Ezraite prophesied that God would say of me, I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I anointed him (Tehillim / Psalms 89:21). Hence, The Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul.*”

Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 1 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דִּבּוּר הַמַּתְחִיל) saying “*For the leader; with stringed music. Maschil of David; when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:1).*” The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says, if a ruler listens to lies, all his servants are wicked (Mishley / Proverbs 29:12).*” The entire midrash states the following:

<p>מדרש תהלים פרק נד סימן א</p> <p>א למנצה בנגינות [משכיל לדוד] בבוא הזיפים ויאמרו לשאול. זהו שאמר הכתוב מושל מקשיב על דבר שקר כל משרתיו רשעים (משלי כט יב), אמר ר' מאיר בשם ר' יוסף, כך היו ישראל, כיון שראו הזיפים לשאול שהיה מטה אזנו לשמוע לשון הרע על דוד, היו באים ואומרים לו, וכן הוא אומר בבוא דואג האדומי וגו' (תהלים נב ב), וכן בנבל הוא אומר מי דוד ומי בן ישי (ש"א שמואל א' כה י), וכיון שראו הזיפים שהיה מקבל לשון הרע, מיד באו גם הם, דכתיב בבוא הזיפים ויאמרו לשאול הלא דוד מסתתר עמנו.</p>	<p>Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 1</p> <p>1. For the leader; with stringed music. Maschil of David; when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:1). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says, if a ruler listens to lies, all his servants are wicked (Mishley / Proverbs 29:12). Rabbi Meir said in the name of rabbi Joseph, such were the children of Israel. When the Ziphites beheld Saul incline his ear to listen to slander against David, they came and betrayed him to Saul saying, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:2). Scripture tells us that Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul (Tehillim / Psalms 54:2), and tells also that Nabal asked mockingly Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? (1 Samuel 25:10). Therefore, when the Ziphites observed that Saul accepted the others' slander, they also came, as it is written, The Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (Tehillim / Psalms 54:1-2).</p>
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The midrash comments on the opening verses of *Tehillim / Psalms 54* regarding David hiding in the region of the Ziphites. The Ziphites come to Saul and tell him the approximate location of David. They say in *1 Samuel 23:19* *Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Does not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?* (NASB) The Ziphites appear to be loyal to Saul and are aware of Saul seeking the life of David. They tell Saul David's approximate location saying that he is in the wood, in the hill of Hachila, south of Jeshimon. Ellicott's Commentary states the following regarding the location of Jesimon:

On the south of Jeshimon— *Jeshimon is not the name of a place, but it signifies a "desert" or "solitude" (see Isaiah 43:19). It is used here for the "dreary desert which extends between the Dead Sea and the Hebron Mountains. . . . It is a plateau of white chalk, terminated on the east by cliffs, which rise vertically from the Dead Sea shore to a height of above 3,000 feet. The scenery is barren and wild beyond all description."*—Conder: *Tent Life in Palestine*. *This is the wilderness of Judea spoken of in Matthew 3:1. David was just then encamped with some of his followers in some thickets bordering on this trackless desert. The Ziphites evidently knew the country well, not only the hills, but the solitary wastes stretching out at its base. They were willing and ready, if Saul's trained soldiers marched into their neighbourhood, to act as their guides in the pursuit or the famous outlaw and his men. They kept their promise faithfully, and in the pursuit which followed the arrival of Saul and his forces, David was in extreme danger of capture. The news that the Philistines had invaded the territories of Saul in great force hastily summoned the king from the district, and David was thus saved from a destruction which appeared to be imminent. (Ellicott's commentary on 1 Samuel 23:19)*

The description of the region seems to indicate that David may be trapped with the cliffs to the dead sea on one side. Reading the Apostolic Writings, *Matthew 3:1* tells us an interesting fact about John Ha'matbil (Baptizer) being located in the wilderness of Judea, the same location David was hiding. John was teaching repentance and causing those who were repentant to be immersed in a mikvah.

The homiletic introduction to the midrash states that if a ruler listens to lies, all of his servants are wicked. This reminds us of the book of Jeremiah, where the prophets who surrounded the king always spoke false prophecies. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in 626 BCE. He was the son of Hilkiyah from the village of Anathoth (*Jeremiah 1:1*). Jeremiah was called by the Lord to give prophesy of Jerusalem's destruction

that would occur by invaders from the North (*Jeremiah 1-4*). The reason for the Lord bringing destruction was because Israel had been unfaithful to the covenant and had forsaken the Lord God by worshiping the Baals (*Jeremiah 2-9*). Israel had gone as far as building altars to Baal in order to burn their children in fire as offerings (*Jeremiah 19:4-5*). This nation had deviated so far from God's ways that they had broken the covenant, causing the Lord to withdraw his blessings. Jeremiah was guided by the Lord to proclaim that the nation of Israel would be faced with famine, be plundered and taken captive by foreigners who would exile them to a foreign land. At the same time while Jeremiah was prophesying coming destruction because of the sins of the nation, a number of other prophets were prophesying peace. (*Jeremiah 6:13-15, 14:14-16, 23:9-40, 27-28, Lamentations 2:14*) The Lord also had Jeremiah speak against these false prophets, for example, during the reign of King Zedekiah, The Lord instructed Jeremiah to make a yoke of the message that the nation would be subject to the king of Babylon and that listening to the false prophets would bring a much worse disaster. The prophet Hananiah opposed Jeremiah's message. He took the yoke off of Jeremiah's neck, broke it, and prophesied to the priests and all the people that within two years the Lord would break the yoke of the king of Babylon, but the Lord spoke to Jeremiah saying "Go and speak to Hananiah saying, you have broken the yoke of wood, but you have made instead a yoke of iron." (*Jeremiah 28:13*) In this situation we find the wisdom of the words from king Solomon in proverbs and from the midrash, "Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says, if a ruler listens to lies, all his servants are wicked (*Mishley / Proverbs 29:12*)." The danger of surrounding one's self with wicked men is what we find in Jeremiah and the false prophets who speak words that were contradictory to God's word. Do you think today this is as important as it was back in Jeremiah's day to keep ourselves from being surrounded by wicked men? How do we keep ourselves from being surrounded by wicked men?

The midrash concludes saying "Scripture tells us that Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul (*Tehillim / Psalms 54:2*), and tells also that Nabal asked mockingly Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? (*1 Samuel 25:10*). Therefore, when the Ziphites observed that Saul accepted the others' slander, they also came, as it is written, The Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us? (*Tehillim / Psalms 54:1-2*)" The midrash states that the Ziphites observed that Saul had accepted slander. Does this suggest that the wicked tend to be drawn to those of the same nature? Was it because Saul had demonstrated his own unrighteousness by accepting the slander of Doeg that the Ziphites heard and were trying to help? Remember that Saul commanded the death of the priests of God at the Tabernacle. Could the Ziphites have heard about this and accepted what had taken place? This seems to be almost unimaginable. The point is that the unrighteous tend to congregate together. Those who love Lashon Harah tend to hang around others who love Lashon Harah so they can tell their stories (gossip) and continue the works of unrighteousness. In *Matthew 15:19-20* we read "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts..." Yeshua taught that the wicked heart produces "...murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." The heart of a man, what comes out of a wicked heart is iniquity and sin. When we look at society specifically, we can see sin multiplying. Sin multiplies, we can see this in the life of David and Saul, when one accepts slander, it has the capability of causing others to fall into slanderous actions as well. The heart of man that is filled with all types of evil, is the reason why we find in the Apostolic Writings that man needs a new heart. In Yeshua the Messiah, we are given a new heart, one that loves the ways of God, and seeks truth, justice, mercy, and forgiveness of others.

Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 2 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying "Save me O God, by Your name (*Tehillim / Psalms 54:3*)." The homiletic introduction to the Midrash states, "David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, when a centenaries persecutes a man, the man may complain against him to the prefect, and when the prefect persecutes him, the man may complain against him to the emperor." The rabbis open with a parable about a persecuted man, a prefect, and the emperor. The entire midrash states the following:

<p style="text-align: center;">מדרש תהלים פרק נד סימן ב</p> <p>ב אלהים בשמך הושיעני. אמר דוד לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם קטנטין שהוא רודף לאדם, קובל עליו לאיפרכוס, ואיפרכוס כשהוא רודף, קובל עליו למלך, ואם המלך רודף לאיפרכוס, למי הוא קובל, אין לו למי לקבול אלא לך, כך אמר דוד לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם שאול הוא מלך, למי אני קובל עליו, אלא לך עלי לקבול, הוי אלהים בשמך הושיעני ובגבורתך תדינני. מהו ובגבורתך תדינני, כמו שכתבת בתורתך (אל) [לא] תסגיר עבד אל אדוניו (דברים כג טז), מה עבד זה, אמש היה עובד עבודה זרה, ואמרתי אם יבא אצלך אל תסגירהו אל אדוניו, אני שאני נשיא בן נשיא, שנאמר ונחשון הוליד את (שמלה ושמלה) [שלמה, ושלמון] הוליד את בועז ובעז הוליד את עובד ועובד הוליד את ישי וישי הוליד את דוד (רות ד כ כב), אל תסגירני ביד שאול המלך, הוי אומר ובגבורתך תדינני, בגבורה של תורה, שנאמר לי עצה ותושיה אני בינה לי</p>	<p>Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 2</p> <p>2. <i>Save me O God, by Your name (Tehillim / Psalms 54:3). David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, when a centenaries persecutes a man, the man may complain against him to the prefect, and when the prefect persecutes him, the man may complain against him to the emperor. But when the emperor persecutes the prefect, to whom may the prefect complain? He has no one to complain to except to You Lord. Just so David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, Saul is king. To whom am I to complain against him? I can only complain to You. Thus David said, Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength (Tehillim / Psalms 54:3). What did he mean by the words, And judge me by Your strength? He meant judge me by Your Torah in which You have written, You will not deliver unto his master a bondman that is escaped from his master unto you (Devarim / Deuteronomy 23:16). If You have said even of a bondman who yesterday served idols that When he comes to you, you will not deliver him unto his master, surely You will not deliver me into the hand of King Saul, for I am a prince, and the son of a prince, as is said Nahshon begot Salmon; Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David (Ruth 4:20-22). And so Judge me by Your strength, that is by the strength of Torah, which says, Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine (Mishley / Proverbs 8:14).</i></p>
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The idea is that when a man is persecuted, he can go to the prefect. The “prefect” is a “magistrate, administrator; police commander; officer, curator; ruler, governor” to whom one may go to for justice. In the life of David, the king was supposed to be the one who administers justice on behalf of his people (e.g. the poor, the innocent, etc). In the case when the land is full of wickedness and justice cannot be obtained by going to the “prefect,” or in this case, to the king (King Saul), one must go further up to the emperor for justice. According to the midrash, the one who is greater is the emperor, and the reference is to the Lord God Almighty who has the greatest authority, who is righteous, just, and hears the prayer of help from the humble and innocent man. The midrash states “He has no one to complain to except to You Lord. Just so David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, Saul is king. To whom am I to complain against him? I can only complain to You. Thus David said, Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength (Tehillim / Psalms 54:3).”

The midrash continues asking the question on David’s words from the Aramaic Targum which states in Tehillim / Psalms 54:3, ג אלהא בשמך פרוק יתי ובכה ברוח גבורתך דון יתי: *O God, by your name redeem me, and by the strength of your might judge me. (EMC)* The word in question is ברוח גבורתך (*be’ruach giburtecha*) meaning “in the spirit of your might and strength.” The midrash states that the words “judge me by Your strength” refers to judging by God’s Torah. It is interesting how the Aramaic Targum translates the Masoretic Text using the words for “in the spirit of your might and strength” and the midrash says this is a reference to the Torah. The way these things come together, this may be a reference to the Torah as a way for walking in strength and might of God according to the Spirit.

In past Torah studies (*See from Bits of Torah Truths, Parshiot Nitzavim and Vayelech - 2014 and Parashat Vayera - 2014 at www.matsati.com*) the Torah perspective on the usage of the word circumcise (מָל), we find parallels of circumcision of the flesh to circumcising the heart, the ears, and the lips. The Scriptures illustrate the concept that our lives consist of both physical and spiritual counterparts. The Torah teaches

us about both physical and spiritual aspects of our lives. For every physical thing we do, there is a spiritual counterpart. For every physical thing we do there are spiritual consequences. According to the Torah the spiritual aspect of our lives is as important if not more important than anything else which is emphasized in the concept of circumcising the heart, the ears, and the lips. This is a very important when we consider our spiritual walk before God. This is very similar to the rabbinic concept put forward in *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* (מדרש תהלים פרק נ סימן ב). *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* opens saying, “I do not reprove you for your sacrifices (*Tehillim / Psalms 50:8*).” The homiletic introduction to the Midrash states, “*Rabbi Nakhman taught in the name of Rabbi Berechiah, If a man intends to do a righteous act, the Holy One blessed be He, writes it down before Him, as if already done, for the verse goes on to say your rising thoughts are continuously before Me.*” Rabbi Nakhman says that he learned from Rabbi Berechiah that if a man has the intention to perform a righteous act, the Lord writes it down as if he had already performed the act. According to this interpretation, the rabbis suggest that the spiritual supersedes the physical. This sort of interpretation is not restricted to *Tehillim / Psalms 50*, we also know that rabbi Yochanan Ben Zachai, taught the idea that “*G’millut KhaSadim*” (*deeds of loving kindness*) may substitute for the blood atonement. The rabbinic teaching is that when one reads the commandments in the Torah regarding atonement, if a man reads with the correct intention, it is as if he has performed them. This interpretation is derived from select verses out of the Tanach such as the following:

Hosea 6:6 *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* (KJV) וְכִי הִסֵּד הַפִּצְתִּי וְלֹא-זָבַח וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲלֹת:

Hosea 14:2 *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.* (KJV) גְּקַחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל-יְהוָה אֱמָרוּ אֵלָיו כָּל-תְּשׁוּאָא עֲוֹן וְקַח-טוֹב וְנִשְׁלַמָּה פְּרִים שְׂפִתֵינוּ:

These interpretations most likely were the result of the destruction of the second Temple coming out of The Council of Jamnia, which was held in Yavneh and the restructuring of Judaism into today’s form of Rabbinical Judaism.

According to the prophets, in *Isaiah 8:20* we read “*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*” Isaiah states that our actions bear witness to our faith in the Lord. This is the concept of “*faithfulness.*” Our faithfulness in life demonstrates our faith, our testimony, our walk before God; these things are to be consistent with the Torah which is the testimony of God. In the midrash from *Tehillim / Psalms 50*, one’s intention is more important than the deed and that intention secures the deed in written form before the Lord. The rabbis are elevating the spiritual above the physical aspects of one’s life similar to the Torah concept of circumcision of the heart, ears, and lips as compared to the flesh. (see *Joshua 3-5* and pay close attention to *circumcision and entering the Promised Land.*)

In addition to this, we read in *Vayikra / Leviticus* from Parashat Kedoshim (*Vayikra / Leviticus 19:1-20:27*) and Parashat Behar (*Vayikra / Leviticus 25:1-26:2*) additional information regarding the spiritual aspect of our faith according to the Torah. In the rabbinic literature, the evil tongue is described as being the source of all plagues and is worse than shedding blood, sexual immorality, and idolatry (*Mishnah Arachin 15b, Midrash Rabba Deuteronomy 6:8, Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer, 53, Bava Batra 164b*). What we say and how we say it has some very significant spiritual consequences. When the Apostle Paul was writing to the non-Jewish believers in Galatia, he wrote on the topic of the tongue and biting and devouring one another in *Galatians 5:13-26*.

Galatians 5:13-26

5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 5:15 But if you

bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 5:19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 5:26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (NASB)

Paul's words to the Galatians is very important because he is speaking on this very same topic of the evil tongue. Most people believe Paul was quoting Yeshua's words but in fact, both Yeshua and Paul were quoting from Parashat Kedoshim out of the Torah. Paul quotes from *Vayikra / Leviticus 19:18* in *Galatians 5:14* saying we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. In addition to this, Paul may possibly be basing his exhortation to the Galatians out of Parashat Behar in *Vayikra / Leviticus 25*, similar to Midrash Rabbah on Parashat Behar in saying to "not do wrong to one another" versus "death and life are in the power of the tongue." In Paul's discussion on the tongue, the biting and devouring one another he contrasts the walking in the Spirit to walking in the flesh. He lists the attributes of those who walk in the Flesh, and those who walk in the Spirit. *Galatians 5* may be summarized in the following way:

The deeds of the flesh are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

He says those who walk in the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God, and those who walk in the Spirit will inherit the kingdom of God. He says that against such (e.g. *walking in the spirit*) there is no Law. The most interesting aspect of these Scriptures is with regard to the Torah Portions. Paul speaks of loving our neighbor and doing no wrong to one another and walking in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit is synonymous to submitting our lives to these commands. Submitting our lives to God's Torah, we submit to His ways, to peace, to love, to joy, to goodness, to faithfulness, to patience, and to life. This is what it means to walk in the Messiah, in Yeshua, in Christ, and God enables us, and transforms us in His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. This may also be what it means from the Aramaic Targum translation of God delivering David "in the spirit of your might and strength" and the midrashic reference to the Torah as God's strength. Can you see how the Apostolic Writings tie into the Torah portion and the midrash on understanding God's strength is by His Spirit and the Torah? In addition to this, to walk after the flesh is to not walk in God's ways which is synonymous to not submitting our lives to God's commands. Have you ever heard that walking after the flesh is following the Law? Can you see this is not really true?

Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 2 concludes saying, "And so Judge me by Your strength, that is by the strength of Torah, which says, Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine (*Mishley / Proverbs 8:14*)." The midrash states that the Lord will judge each man by His Law found in the five books of Moshe. Wise counsel and wisdom are found in God's Law. We know this to be true based upon the various Parshiot listed above and from the Apostolic Writings. The point of the midrash is to study the Scriptures for the purpose of drawing near to the Lord, to know Him, and to walk in His footsteps. To walk

in the footsteps of the Messiah, to abide in Him, in His truth, and His ways. These are the things the Lord approves of and desires for our lives.

Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 3 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying “Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth (Tehillim / Psalms 54:4).” The homiletic introduction to the Midrash states “According to rabbi Hoshai, David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, Doeg came and slandered me, and Saul accepted the slander from him and listened to him.” The entire midrash states the following:

<p style="text-align: center;">מדרש תהלים פרק נד סימן ג</p> <p>ג אלהים (שמעה) [שמע] תפלתי האזינה [לא-מרי פי]. אמר ר' הושעיא אמר דוד לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם בא דואג וסיפר לשון הרע עלי, וקיבל שאול ממנו ושמע לו, באו הזיפים והקשיב להם, [אני איני הולך אצלו אלא אצלך שמעי הימני והאזין לי], אלהים שמע תפלתי, למה כי זרים קמו עלי, לא שמו אלהים לנגדם סלה, לא נתנו בדעתם על מה שכתוב בתורה ארור מכה רעהו בסתר (דברים כז כד), ועל מה הכינו דעתם, על מה שאמר להם שאול ברוכים אתם לה' (ש"ב שמואל ב' ב ה), אם בני אדם ארורים הם, כבר הם ארורים שארם משה, ארור מכה רעהו בסתר, הוי לא שמו אלהים לנגדם סלה. הנה (ה') [אלהים] עוזר לי ה' בסומכי נפשי. אמר לו מי אמר לך, אמר ר' שמעון בן פזי אמר דוד עד שאני במעי אמי נתנבא עלי איתן האזרחי, שנאמר מצאתי דוד עבדי בשמן קדשי משחתיו (תהלים פט כא), הוי ה' בסומכי נפשי.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 3</p> <p>3. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth (Tehillim / Psalms 54:4). According to rabbi Hoshai, David said to the Holy One blessed be He, Master of the universe, Doeg came and slandered me, and Saul accepted the slander from him and listened to him. The Ziphites came, and Saul heeded them also. I will not go to Saul, but to You. Hear me. Give ear unto me. Hear my prayer Oh God. For strangers have risen up against me, they have not set God before them (Tehillim / Psalms 54:5). They have not set their minds on what is written in the Torah, cursed be he that smites his neighbor in secret (Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24). But what have they set their minds on? On what Saul said to them, Blessed be you of the Lord (1 Samuel 23:21). But of what avail Saul's blessing, if they are accursed men? They have been long accursed, for Moshe cursed them saying, Cursed be he that smites his neighbor in secret. Hence it is said, They have not set God before them. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul (Tehillim / Psalms 54:6). They asked David, Who told you this? According to rabbi Simeon son of Pazzi, David replied, When I was in the womb of my mother, Ethan and Ezra-hite prophesied that God would say of me, I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I anointed him (Tehillim / Psalms 89:21). Hence, The Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul.</p>
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The rabbis are discussing David's prayer to the Lord regarding Doeg's slander and Saul listening to the slander. The Ziphites came and revealed the location of David and his men, and Saul also listened to them. David says, “I will not go to Saul, but to You. Hear me. Give ear unto me. Hear my prayer OH God. For strangers have risen up against me, they have not set God before them (Tehillim / Psalms 54:5).” According to the Torah, Moshe wrote in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24-26*:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24-26

27:24 'Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'
 27:25 'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'
 27:26 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (NASB)

כד אָרור מִכֵּה רֵעֵהוּ בְּסֵתֶר וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעַם אָמֵן: כה אָרור לֹקֵחַ שֹׁחַד לְהַכּוֹת נַפְשׁ דָּם נָקִי וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעַם אָמֵן: כו אָרור אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָקִים אֶת-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה-הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעַם אָמֵן:

According to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24*, it is possible to strike someone in secrete. How can a person strike another person in secret? How can a man be struck and not be aware of it? According to the midrash, this kind of attack is accomplished via Lashon Harah (slander or gossip). The Torah says the one

who strikes in secret, the one who gossips or slanders by the midrashic parallel, is accursed. The one who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person is accursed, and the one who does not obey the words of this Law (הַתּוֹרָה-הַזֹּאת) are accursed. The midrash continues saying that Saul blessed those who committed slander. However, the problem is that Saul himself is accursed because he did not obey these commands in the Torah. The rabbis ask “*But of what avail Saul’s blessing, if they are accursed men?*” and state that long ago Scripture says they are accursed because they are striking their neighbor in secret (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24*). Their blessing is worthless. The Torah defines righteousness, and living in a righteous way, what the Lord in Heaven expects from us. If a person claims to be “*in the Messiah*” but does not live a righteous life, as in the example given here from the Torah in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 27:24*, and lives a life of slander, gossip, and lashon harah (לשון הרע), is such a person cursed if they believe in Jesus but yet practice these things? Can a blessing come out of performing cursed works like we find here in the midrash? According to the midrash, these men (Doeg, Saul, and the Ziphites) did not set God before them. This comment suggests that walking in God’s ways, is a way of putting the Lord before us; this is another way of saying “putting Him first in our lives.”

Based upon this midrash, Judaism is intensely aware of the power of speech and of the harm that can be done through speech. In previous midrashim, the rabbis comment that the universe itself was created through speech. In addition to this, of the forty three sins enumerated in the “*Al Chet*” (confession of sins) recited on Yom Kippur, eleven are sins committed through speech. The Talmud states that the tongue is an instrument so dangerous that it must be kept hidden from view, behind two protective walls (the mouth and teeth) to prevent its misuse. Remember in a previous Psalms study that the tongue is held behind a prison of teeth and yet it cannot be tamed and is a world of evil and set on fire from hell. According to the Rabbis, the harm done by speech is even worse than the harm done by stealing or by cheating someone financially, because amends may be made for monetary harm, but the harm done by speech can never be repaired. For this reason, some rabbinic sources indicate that there is no forgiveness for lashon harah because of the nature of gossip or evil speech is done in secret and cannot be repaid or taken back. A Chasidic tale illustrates this point:

A man went about the community telling malicious lies about the rabbi. Later, he realized the wrong he had done, and began to feel remorse. He went to the rabbi and begged his forgiveness, saying he would do anything he could to make amends. The rabbi told the man, “Take a feather pillow, cut it open, and scatter the feathers to the winds.” The man thought this was a strange request, but it was a simple enough task, and he did it gladly. When he returned to tell the rabbi that he had done it, the rabbi said, “Now, go and gather the feathers. Because you can no more make amends for the damage your words have done than you can recollect the feathers.” (<http://chabad.org>)

Here, in the tale told by the rabbis, they parallel our words to feathers to be gathered and the impossibility of collecting the feathers back. Speech has also been compared to an arrow in the sense that once one’s words are released, like an arrow, they cannot be recalled, the harm they do cannot be stopped, and the harm they do cannot always be predicted, for words like arrows often go astray. As you can see, we need to be very careful about the words we say to one another. In the Psalm David says, “*Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul (Tehillim / Psalms 54:6).*” When we take action with our tongue or by our words, we are not trusting in the Lord to be the upholder of our souls.

Midrash Tehillim 54, Part 3 concludes saying, “*According to rabbi Simeon son of Pazzi, David replied, When I was in the womb of my mother, Ethan and Ezrahite prophesied that God would say of me, I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I anointed him (Tehillim / Psalms 89:21). Hence, The Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul.*” Rabbi Simeon says that David believed the Lord had anointed him and called him from birth, and that the Lord is the upholder of his soul. The point is that the Lord is to be placed first in our lives. Yeshua said something similar in *Matthew 6:19-25*:

Matthew 6:19-25

6:19 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 6:20 'But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 6:21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 6:22 'The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 6:23 'But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 6:24 'No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 6:25 'For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (NASB)

Yeshua instructs us not to store up treasure on earth, but to store up treasure in heaven. He speaks of what our hearts focus upon in life, on heavenly things, or on dark and evil things. We cannot serve light, truth, righteousness, mercy, and peace, and also serve unrighteousness, wickedness, and darkness. The parallel here that Yeshua makes is that one cannot serve God and money. He concludes saying that we are not to worry about this life, food, drink, cloths, because life is more than these things. Yeshua's words are a parallel to the point of the midrash, that we are to put the Lord first in our lives, He is the upholder of our souls. Our lives are to be devoted to the Lord, even the words of our lips are to be devoted to the Lord, to speak only what is good and righteous, and not for the harm of others. Let's Pray!

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for your mercies and the grace you show us each day. We know that the tongue is full of all kinds of evil, please have mercy on us for the words that we say that do not bring glory to Your name. We ask Lord that you would increase our faith, and help us to bring glory to Your name! You have demonstrated the greatness of Your love for us in Your Son Yeshua the Messiah. Thank You Lord for sending Your son Yeshua that we may enter into the covenant of peace that You have promised to Your people. Help us to grow in our faith, to walk in the spirit, and apply these truths to our lives. We praise Your Holy Name and give You all of the honor, and the glory, and the praise forever and ever.

In Yeshua's (Jesus') Name we pray! Amen!

Be Blessed in Yeshua, Christ our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:
Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
"Yeshua" King Messiah forever and ever

Notes