

Psalm 4

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

When I call, Answer me, O God of my righteousness!
From distress, Give relief to me;
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

O sons of men, how long
My honor/glory into shame?
(How long) will you love what is worthless/deceitful
(How long) will you seek a lie? *Selah*.

But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself;
The LORD will hear when I call to Him.

Tremble, and do not sin;
Search in your heart upon your bed, and be still. *Selah*

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust in the LORD.

Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?"
Let shine upon us the light of Thy countenance, O LORD!

You have put joy in my heart,
More than when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
For Thou O LORD, alone, in safety makes me dwell.

(superscription)

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

(a) call	בִּקְרָאִי (v 2)	(e) bed	מִשְׁכָּב (v 5)
	בִּקְרָאִי (v 4)	lie down	אֲשַׁכֵּב (v 9)
(b) righteousness	צְדָקָי (v 2)	(f) trust	בַּטְחוּ (v 6)
	צְדָק (v 6)	safety	בַּטָּח (v 9)
(c) hear	שִׁמְעָה (v 2)	(g) many	רַבִּים (v 7)
	יִשְׁמָע (v 4)	abound	רַבוּ (v 8)
(d) heart	לִבִּי (v 5)		
	לֵב (v 8)		

(4:1)

When I call, Answer me, O God of my righteousness!
From distress, Give relief to me;
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

Lexical Notes:

❑ Elohim (not YHWH)

❑ Righteousness is *Tsedeq*:

- “righteousness, justice, rightness, i.e., the act. of doing what is required according to a standard”
- “The earliest usages of ṣedeq or ṣēdāqâ (except Gen 15:6; 18:19; 30:33, sēdāqâ) occur in relation to the **functions of judges**. All of their deliverances or decisions are to be according to the truth and without partiality (Lev 19:15). It is applied similarly to weights and measures (Lev 19:36)... The man who is righteous tries to preserve the peace and prosperity of the community by fulfilling the commands of God in regard to others. In the supreme sense the righteous man (ṣaddîq) is one who serves God (Mal 3:18). Specifically, he, like Job, delivers the poor and orphan, helps the blind along the way, supports the weak and is a father (provider) to the poor (Job 29:12–15). This was the righteous “clothing” of

Job's life. To return the poor man's pledged coat before sundown so that it may serve as his night clothes is righteousness (Deut 24:13), the purpose in this case being the man's comfort. But the "righteousness" consisted in obedience to God's law and conformity to God's nature, having mercy for the needy and helpless.... The **forensic** aspect of *ṣedeq* applies to the equality of all, rich and poor, before the law. The righteous one, the *ṣaddîq*, is not to be put to death (Ex 23:7) for the law does not condemn him... It should be emphasized that in Israel's law the judge was not considering a man's innocence with regard to breaking a human law, but a man's righteousness in regard to God's law. Today a man may transgress a statute but be innocent before God. In the OT law, **to be innocent and to be righteous were one and the same**" [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*]

- ❑ Distress/Relief are spatial words (confinement, expansion)—"breathing room"
- ❑ Gracious – is HNH (cf. "Hannah"); equals our NT word "*charis*"

"The psalmist turns to prayer with trouble brooding in his mind; he has been accused, quite unjustly, of some crime or sin and though he knows that he is innocent, the reproach hangs heavily upon him. All he can do is turn to God; he has no particular request, other than that God hear him and grant him some peace of mind... [WBC]

"By a series of four imperatives, the **psalmist pours out his heart before God**: "Answer me," "give me relief," "be merciful," and "hear my prayer."... Boldly, and yet humbly, he casts himself on the "mercy" of God, who has covenanted to be loving and faithful to his own (Exod 34:6). The verbal phrase "be merciful to me" (*honneni*) is related to the noun "favor" (*hen*) and to the divine attribute "gracious" (*hannun*).

"Feeling **hemmed** in and constrained by his human enemies, he asks the God of his "righteousness" (the One who knows he is innocent) to give him room, or to release him from the straits and pressures to which he has been subjected. He requests God's grace, which would bring release from the human accusations.[WBC]

(4:2)

O sons of men, how long My honor/glory (will you turn) into shame?
 (How long) will you love what is worthless/deceitful
 (How long) will you seek a lie? Selah.

"The interrogative ("how long?") is used only once at the beginning of the first clause, but it is to be understood as introducing all three clauses. "

“The source of his anxiety is described as the “sons of man” (v 3), who **are persons of significance or influence, as distinct from the common people** (see the distinction between the **בְּנֵי אִישׁ** “sons of a man” and the humbler **בְּנֵי אָדָם** “sons of a human” in Ps 62:9). These “sons of man,” in their persistent pursuit of vanity and lies, **have made the psalmist’s reputation as nothing**, a word of reproach, and their words come to his mind as he engages in prayer. So **he prays for God to answer, for the accusers will not answer his protestations of innocence, but merely persist in their falsehood**. Feeling hemmed in and constrained by his human enemies, he asks the God of his “righteousness” (the One who knows he is innocent) to give him room, or to release him from the straits and pressures to which he has been subjected. He requests God’s grace, which would bring release from the human accusations.” [WBC]

The "men" (bene 'ish v. 2) belong to the class of prominent citizens. As a class they form the landowners, the wealthy, and the powerful in Israel's society (cf. 49:2; 62:9; Isa 2:9; 5:15; note: EVV do not bring out the distinction as in Heb.). The leadership has gone astray. They are opposed to the king and have shown their enmity in two ways.

First, the leaders have scoffed at his "glory"; i.e., they have despised the position of the king. "Glory" (kabod) is bestowed by God on his anointed king (3:3). Second, they characterize themselves by a diligent pursuit of what is "vain" (NIV, "delusions") and "deceptive" (NIV, "false gods"; NIV mg., "seek lies"). These words explain how they have trodden the king's glory into the ground by betraying it for an unspecified worthless cause. [EBCOT]

(4:3)

**But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself;
The LORD will hear when I call to Him.**

Lexical notes:

- ❑ This ‘set apart’ is NOT the same as sanctification. This means to ‘treat differently’ (like Goshen and Israel’s livestock in the Exodus plagues, Ex 8.18, 9.4) [3 words for OT ‘set apart’: *qadesh* (set apart for religious service, good or bad, could be temporary—emphasis on ‘not for everyday uses’), *herem* (removed completely, once-and-for-all from the life of this world, emphasis on ‘removed from any future influences on you’), *pelah* (treated ‘better’, as different from others—emphasis on ‘better relationship’—translated ‘wonderful’ sometimes)]
- ❑ ‘Godly man’ is *hasid* (the one who practices *hesed*—the word for faithfulness, good-heartedness, ‘godly’); not holiness [*qadesh*] or righteousness [*tsedek*] but these can overlap (Ps 16.10).

“This verse is the basis for the psalmist’s amazement (v. 2) and his advice (v. 4).”

[BKC]

“However, the message of Psalm 4 is as follows: having cried out to God for help, the psalmist **warned his enemies not to sin against God by wronging him, because** God had set him apart in protective care, a fact that caused him to rejoice in the face of opposition.
[BKC]

(4:4)

Tremble and do not sin;

Search in your heart upon your bed, and be still. *Selah*

Lexical note: ‘sin’ is *hata*, ‘miss the mark’==*hamartanein* (in NT)

“V 5 is difficult, both with respect to translation and interpretation. It might be paraphrased as follows: **“You can tremble with anger and rage, but don’t sin by doing anything! You can speak your evil words within your hearts, but don’t speak them out loud! Lie still and silent upon your beds, where you can do no harm.”** The psalmist advises his adversaries to keep their rage within themselves, to maintain control of their actions and their evil words. It was when they spoke out loud and acted (v 3) that their inner evil was released to afflict the innocent. And though silence and lack of action would not remove the rot within, it would at least curtail its evil effects.

4:4-5. **The only recourse, then, for the wicked was to abandon their sinful plans** and become worshipers of the Lord. **Diligent souls searching for the Lord would be led to act properly toward David.** They would desist from their opposition, that is, they would be silent.

“He warns his adversaries **against blind passion**, and counsels them to quiet converse with their own hearts, and solitary meditation, in order that they may not imperil their own salvation. To commune with one’s own heart, without the addition of the object, is equivalent to to think alone by one’s self, and the bed or resting-place, without requiring to be understood literally, points to a condition of mind that is favourable to quiet contemplation. The heart is the seat of the conscience, and the Spirit of God disguises itself as our own voice that we may see His exhortation, His counsel, and His wisdom well up out of our own stony heart. “ [Keil& Delitzsch]

(4:5)

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.

Lexical notes:

- ☐ “offer/sacrifices” are *zeba*: offer communal sacrifices, to restore communion with another

- ❑ Righteousness here is *tsedek* (accuracy, honesty, equity, loyalty to community)
- ❑ Trust is the word for active faith (*batah*): “trust, rely on, put confidence in, i.e., believe in a person or object to the point of reliance upon (2Ki 18:5)” [Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*]. This word emphasizes more the confidence that comes from trust. It is the main word for trust/faith in the Psalms (where it is connected with concrete deliverance); other words for faith occur elsewhere in the OT (e.g., *aman* is used in the famous passages of Gen 15.6 and Hab 2.4.)

(4:6)

Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?"

Let shine upon us the light of Thy countenance, O LORD!

“It is not clear who the "many" were. Were they the skeptics, or were they his supporters who honestly questioned what was happening? Whoever they were, **David prayed for them also and called on God to make his covenant blessings evident**. He did this **by an allusion to the priestly benediction (Num 6:24-26)**. They asked, "Who can show us any good?" David responded by pointing away from himself and to the Lord as the author of blessing.

“**light of God’s face**. The metaphor “light of God’s face” is found in royal letters from the Egyptian city of Amarna and in Ugaritic correspondence. For example, “the face of the Sun (i.e., Pharaoh) shone brightly upon me” is a statement made by one of the Egyptian king’s subordinates. [*The IVP Bible background commentary : Old Testament*]

Num 6.22ff:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites:

You shall say to them,

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

27 So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. [NRSV]

“Early in the prayer, the psalmist recalled mentally the words of the **arrogant adversaries** (v 3), but now, as his thoughts progress, it is the words of the **pusillanimous doubters** which come to mind, the people who say: “Who will show us good?” **And the dubious help of doubters can sometimes be as dangerous as the arrogant words of enemies!** An attack by enemies can be thwarted if the innocent person has trust in God, **but when nagging doubts arise, confidence can easily be undermined**. Enemies are real and all too visible, but is there anybody who can really help against them? Can God really do any good?”

(4:7)

You have put joy in my heart,
More than when their grain and new wine abound.

“The joy and contentment David experienced in trusting in the Lord was **greater than the mirth of the harvest festivities**. Even in distress and away from the visible evidence of God’s goodness, he enjoyed peace and safety in his God. **True joy and peace depend not on circumstances but on God’s protection and provisions** (cf. Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17).” [BKC].

“... an inner joy which would be greater than those outward manifestations of joy which characterized his society, the joy and rejoicing which stemmed from a successful harvest of corn and grapes for new wine. The greatest joy for which he prayed was not that of a harvest home, but of an awareness of the light of God’s countenance

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder. (Is 9:2-3)*

(4:8)

In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
For Thou O LORD, alone, in safety makes me dwell.

Lexical notes:

- Peace is *shalom* (contented, calm, confident wellbeing)
- “In safety” is related to the word for ‘trust’

He committed his way to the Lord as he went to sleep. **The enemies may have vexed themselves on their beds (v. 4), but he experienced "peace,"** the peace that comes as a blessing from God (Num 6:26). His confidence in Yahweh "alone" is the reason for his peaceful sleep. The expression "make me dwell in safety" connotes **not only the absence of enemies and hostilities but also the presence of peace** (Deut 33:28; Jer 23:6; Ezek 34:25, 27-28; 38:8, 14; Hos 2:18; cf. Mic 7:14). [EBCOT]

Concluding remarks:

“It is **not a psalm of penitence**, arising out of the recognition of sins committed; there are other psalms for that purpose. It is rather a psalm which reflects the **anguish of the innocent and oppressed, or of the righteous sufferer**. And thus it is a particularly important kind of psalm, for it addresses a fundamental human experience, the experience of injustice, suffering and oppression. ... **There is no suggestion in this psalm that the accusers go away or cease in their accusations. What changes as a consequence of prayer is not the external circumstance, but the inner spirit of the worshiper.** The accusations are like barbs in the mind, needling and prodding, causing anxiety; prayer leads to that **calmness of mind in which the accusations can be accepted and carried, for a greater peace of mind has come from God.** Psalm 4 is thus a prayer which can be used by every believer, for there are none who do not experience, to some degree or another, the turmoil of mind expressed in this poignant psalm. [WBC]

Observations:

1. No prayer against the enemies—only (a) breathing room and (b) blessing on all.
2. Seeks the conversion and recovery of the enemies
3. “Countenance” goes way beyond mere ‘good’—all the way to ‘joy’!
4. One answer to discouragement: look at His ‘face’ (His aggressive kindness, delight)
5. Fruits of the Spirit here! (love, joy, peace)
6. And remember the One who was slandered and rejected on the Cross—who entrusted Himself to God the Father, for such as us...