

PSALMS

Chapter 4

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! ²O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah* ³But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. ⁴Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah* ⁵Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD. ⁶There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!” ⁷You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. ⁸In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Ps 4 Perhaps a prayer for relief when some calamity (possibly drought; see v. 7) has fallen and many are turning from the Lord to the gods of Canaan, from whom they hope to receive better. (CSB)

This psalm was for the director of Israel’s worship services, or perhaps it was to be spoken or sung by the director of a liturgical choir. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, the Lord hears; vv 4–5, trust the Lord; vv 6–7, joy from the Lord; v 8, peace from the Lord. (TLSB)

Psalm 4 is a psalm of comfort, and at the same time a psalm of prayer and instruction that teaches us to trust in God when things go wrong. It rebukes the ungodly, themselves over vain gods and fleshly comfort, yet will not bear to wait confidently for God, who is the highest comfort. God surprises us by how he deals with his saints. At first, he abandons them and tries their faith and patience. On the other hand are the ungodly who want to have a full patience, they mock and despise him and say, “Can this fool tell us what is good? Yes, you Yes, you be patient until a roast chicken flies into your mouth. Trust in that and you will starve!”

This psalm belongs to the First Commandment. It teaches and urges us to hope in God and endure hardship and every need with patience, and it rebukes the faithless and the impatient. Psalm 4 is included in the Third and Seventh Petitions, in which we pray that God’s will be done and that we be delivered from evil. It can also be in the Fourth Petition, when we ask for our daily bread, that is, for peace and all the necessities of life in the face of every earthly need. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

This psalm may be generally classified as a lament psalm, and evening prayer; but because it is so filled with confidence, it is close to being a psalm of confidence. Its motifs reflect the prayer song, Psalm 3. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

4 title See Hab 3:19. *For the director of music.* Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself (see 1Ch 23:5, 30; 25; Ne 11:17). In this liturgical activity the Levites functioned as representatives of the worshiping congregation. Following their lead the people probably responded with “Amen” and “Praise the LORD” (Hallelujah); see 1Ch 16:36; Ne 5:13; cf. 1Co 14:16; Rev 5:14; 7:12; 19:4. *With stringed*

instruments. See Ps 6; 54–55; 61; 67; 76 titles. This is a liturgical notation, indicating that the Levites were to accompany the psalm with harp and lyre (see 1Ch 23:5; 25:1, 3, 6; cf. Ps 33:2; 43:4; 71:22). (CSB)

4:1 *when I call* – Initial request to be heard. (CSB)

righteous. Very often the “righteousness” of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. This faithfulness is in full accordance with his commitments (both expressed and implied) to his people and with his status as the divine King—to whom the powerless may look for protection, the oppressed for redress and the needy for help. (CSB)

distress – Here is means a tight place or bind; a related idea is used for enemies who harass and hem people in. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The situation in this psalm is very similar to that in Psalm 3. In both cases David is taunted by enemies who are sure that he will get no help from God. The taunts of David’s enemies remind us of the taunts of Jesus’ enemies when he was on the cross. (PBC)

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.” He calls on the Lord in his “distress,” though the nature of “distress” is not clear. It could be psychological (25:17) or physical (31:9-10) or both (66:11-12). Boldly and yet humbly he casts himself on the “mercy” of God, who has covenanted to be loving and faithful to his own (Ex. 34:6). Prayer is a form of communication in which the child of God casts himself on the mercy of God. The verbal phrase “be merciful to me” is related to the noun “favor” and to the divine attribute “gracious.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

4:2–3 David rebukes those who turn away from his God to seek relief from the counterfeit gods; he assures them that the Lord will hear him. (CSB)

4:2 *O men,* The “men” 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; Is. 2:9; 5:15). The leadership has gone astray. (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

how long. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “You are deaf to the voice of truth, and you know not the purpose of Him who thinks thoughts of peace, who also speaks peace to His people, and to His saints, and to such as are converted in heart” (*SLSB*, p 159). (TLSB)

The focus is not on his past grievances but on the folly of his enemies’ opposition and their need to repent and trust in the Lord. (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

He appears to be trying to win men from the error of their way. (Leopold)

He warns them that the victory of God’s people is certain; therefore they should turn from their ways before it is too late. (PBC)

my glory. David’s special relationship with the Lord is the source of his glory—or perhaps he here speaks directly of God. (CSB)

These words explain how they have trodden the king's glory into the ground by betraying it for an unspecified, worthless cause. (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

vain words...lies – These expressions probably refer to false accusations that were designed to bring disgrace to David (see Ps. 31:18). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Selah. Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

4:3 *Set apart*. God separates and protects those who hear and obey His Word. (TLSB)

godly. Hebrew *hasid*, which occurs 26 times in the Psalms (once of God: 145:17, “loving”; cf. 18:25) and is usually rendered (in the plural) in the NIV as “the godly” or “saints.” It is one of several Hebrew words for God's people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him. (CSB)

The “godly” is literally the “beloved” (s.v. Ps. 23:6), i.e., one who has received and also practices this loyal love. The point of the line is that God has marked out the godly for himself and will not abandon them to the wicked. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Lord hears – This confident statement picks up the motifs in verse one, “when I call” and “hear my prayer.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

4:4–5 An exhortation not to give way to exasperation or anxiety (lit. “tremble” in anger or fear) but to look to the Lord. (CSB)

4:4 *In your anger do not sin*. Paul uses these words in a different context (see Eph 4:26). (CSB)

“Tremble.” Psalmist exhorts his readers to fear, for he has called God to his aid (v 3), and God has promised to protect the godly. *do not sin*. Melancthon: “Rule over your sorrow and bend your mind so that you may willingly be obedient to God in your anguish” (Chem, *LTh* 2:367). (TLSB)

David was calling for his enemies to be shaken to the core so that they would stop sinning. This is calling for immediate action. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ponder...be silent – What they were to do was to think carefully about their sins and let that quiet, sober reflection cause them to change their ways. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

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4:5 *offer right sacrifices* – In addition to fearing God, which implies guilt, the psalmist urges foes to make atonement. (TLSB)

The psalmist’s instruction to trust in the Lord is wise advice, since the Lord protects those who belong to him and will oppose those who do not. If they trust in the Lord they will become part of those who are dear to God. And the evidence of their faith will be in true worship: “Sacrifice with sacrifices.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

4:6 *who can show us any good?* – David responded by pointing away from himself and to the Lord as the author of blessing. (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

In the face of widespread uncertainty, David prays for the Lord to bless. (CSB)

face shine upon. A common expression for favor, reminiscent of the Aaronic benediction (see Nu 6:25–26). (CSB)

The light of God’s face refers to divine favor for deliverance (cf. Ps. 31:16), so this is a prayer that his favor be given to them. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Allusion to the Aaronic blessing in Nu 6:24–26, requesting that God direct His kindness toward His people. (TLSB)

4:7–8 David’s confidence. (CSB)

4:7 *heart.* In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life” (Pr 4:23). (CSB)

Their grain and new wine – A historical background of this statement of the case may be the fact that David and his men stood in need of provisions (2 Sam. 16:ff.) whereas the enemy appeared to have seized all the stores they needed. (Leupold)

He was affirming that God had given him greater gladness than that which comes with full granaries and vats. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

4:8 *in peace.* Without anxiety. (CSB)

It has an eschatological dimension, as it looks for God to act as the faithful Shepherd, ensuring the security of his people. He alone can fully restore his people to the full experience of his covenantal blessing (cf. Jer. 32:37). (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

He makes bold to say that he shall go to sleep calmly and unafraid. Yahweh alone is the one who can grant a man such a sense of security. (Leupold)

Ps 4 David complains that his enemies are speaking ill of him as king in an attempt to shame him. He reminds them that God sets apart the godly from those who behave in such a manner. How often do we find ourselves speaking ill of people in positions of authority? of colleagues and peers? God's Word condemns unjust complaints. Through David, God encourages us to turn from our sinful ways and "trust in the LORD" (v 5). Such trust brings peace of mind and eternal peace. • You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Teach me to judge rightly and dwell in peace. Amen. (TLSB)