

*THE  
BOOK  
OF  
PSALMS*

# Psalm 4

0 To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

1 Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have relieved me in *my* distress;  
Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.

2 How long, O you sons of men,  
*Will you turn* my glory to shame?  
*How long* will you love worthlessness  
*And seek* falsehood?

Selah

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

4 Be angry, and do not sin.  
Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.

Selah

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And put your trust in the LORD.

6 *There are* many who say,  
“Who will show us *any* good?”  
LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.

7 You have put gladness in my heart,  
More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.

8 I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;  
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

# Introduction

## Title:

“To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.”

The title for Psalm 3 identified the occasion or circumstances of the Psalm as King David’s flight from Jerusalem when he heard that Absalom, his son, was leading a rebellion against him.

The title for Psalm 4 does not identify the occasion, which is one of the reasons some commentators do not believe Psalm 4 is related to Absalom’s rebellion.

The Psalm is addressed to “the Chief Musician”. According to W. S. Plumer, “Addressing the Psalm to one of the leaders of public worship shows that it was for the whole church and not for one man. It is public property.” (p.63)

*Interesting Note:* There is no mention of singing or songs associated with worship in the tabernacle until David appointed Levites “over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after the ark came to rest.” (1 Chronicles 6:31ff) Although Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32 each contain a long song of worship and praise to God, there is no indication that these songs, or any songs, were associated with worshipping God in the tabernacle. The first instance of the use of music related to worship is Leviticus 23:24, where God commands the “blowing of trumpets” for a “sabbath-rest”. And Numbers 10:10 commands that trumpets be blown over the sacrifices and peace offerings. But, there is no mention of the use of songs or singers in the tabernacle until David appoints them in 1 Chronicles 6.

## Background

Psalm 4 is most probably related to the same event as Psalm 3, Absalom's rebellion against King David. Absalom killed his brother, Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister. After he fled and lived in exile for three years, David sent for him. After Absalom and King David were reconciled, Absalom set about making himself popular among the people and promised many who had complaints, if he were made a judge over the people, he would give them justice, implying he would give them what they wanted. After four years, he launched a rebellion against King David.

Psalm 3 records a prayer that depicts David's circumstances as he fled Jerusalem to escape Absalom. Since Psalm 4 does not mention Absalom in the title or elsewhere, there is no direct connection to the same event. Some commentators suggest Psalm 4 would fit with a long period of trouble when King Saul was trying to kill David. They base their argument primarily on verse 2 and the double use of the phrase "How long" in two questions, since the defeat of Absalom did not take a long time. There is nothing else in the Psalm that points to events involving Saul. In fact, David's addressing the "sons of men" indicates that he was dealing with multiple enemies, such as those who deserted him joined Absalom, rather than King Saul as a single antagonist commanding those who were already his followers. Verse 2 also speaks of past deliverance, but prior to Saul's attempts to kill him, David's conflicts with wild animals and with Goliath would not properly be described as "distresses."

Furthermore, careful consideration of the contents of both Psalms makes a strong case for concluding that both Psalms are related to the same event.

## Connection between Psalms 3 and 4

- Both are prayers, actually cries for help.
- Both speak of deliverance (3:1, 7-8; 4:1,8).
- Both refer to David's enemies (3:1-2, 6-7; 4:2,6).
- Both refer to David's glory (3:3, 4:2).
- Both speak of sleeping in the midst of distress and waking in safety because of God's protection (3:5, 4:8) and, thereby introduce a motif of God's ceaseless care for His people that runs throughout the Psalter.

In addition, much of the language in Psalm 4 echoes the language and theological topics of Psalm 3.

### Psalm 3

v.1 who trouble me

vv.1-2 Many are they who rise up

v.3 One who lifts up my head

v.4 He heard me from His holy hill

v.4 I cried (will cry)

v.7 Arise, O Lord

v.8 Salvation belongs to the Lord

### Psalm 4

v.2 how long will you turn  
my glory

v.6 Many who say

v.1 O God of my  
righteousness

v.3 The Lord will hear when  
I call

v.1 Have mercy on me

v.6 Lift up the light of your  
countenance

v.5 put your trust in the Lord

## Structure

Psalm 4 consists of three irregular stanzas:

- I. Cry for help – v. 1
- II. Warning and a call to repentance and faith – vv. 2-5
- III. Contrast between the desires of men and the blessings of God – vv.6-8

# Exposition

## I. Cry for help – v. 1

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have relieved me in *my* distress;

Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer. ” v. 1

- Righteousness
- Distress
- Mercy

David turns to God to defend and protect him against the plots and lies of his enemies. He calls God his “righteousness”. David is not declaring himself sinless, but he is saying that he is not guilty of the accusation of his enemies. The phrase also “teaches that God is the author and source of [our] righteousness, both justifying and purifying.” (Plumer p.64)

The ground of David’s cry for help is not the fact that he is innocent of the accusations of his enemies or on his obedience to God, but on the fact that God has rescued him previously and on God’s mercy not David’s merit.

## Exposition (Continued)

### Application:

#### Verse 1

In every situation we should cry out to God for help. David relied on God's past deliverance as grounds for calling on God for mercy. God has shown that He helps His people in distress and trouble of every kind. He helped David and answered this prayer. What God has done for one He can do for all and what He has done for all He can do for one.

- Hezekiah's prayer: 2 Kings 19:14-19, 35-37
- Red Sea: Exodus 14:13-29
- Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego: Daniel 3:28
- God's promise: Isaiah 41:10
- God's mercy: Psalm 23:6, 25:6



## Exposition (Continued)

### II. Warning and a Call to Repentance and Faith – vv. 2-5

- Attacks of the ungodly – v. 2
- God’s election and guarantee of protection – v. 3
- Warning to think soberly about God and one’s own soul – v. 4
- Call to repentance and faith – v. 5

How long, O you sons of men,  
*Will you turn my glory to shame?*  
*How long will you love worthlessness*  
*And seek falsehood? v. 2*

God had made David king and given him victory in over surrounding nations and prosperity. His enemies wanted to destroy him. What could be more shameful than having your own son trying to kill you?

“love worthlessness” (or vanity) – the rebellion was a futile attempt to overthrow God’s appointed king, so it was worthless.

“falsehoods” – the rebellion was set in motion by lies.  
2 Samuel 15:7 Absalom lies to King David.

## Exposition (Continued)

“But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him.” – v. 3

This is a description of God divinely ordaining David as King. 1 Samuel 16:1-13 As such, it is a declaration of God’s election of His people. God has “set apart for Himself” those who will be His, the godly. “To set apart implies more than mere election. It includes, in David’s case, his anointing to his office by God’s command, and the consequent presence and power of God’s Spirit, qualifying him for his office as the earthly head of the Theocracy.” (Plumer p. 67) In the life of the believer, election includes all of salvation and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to sanctify him and fulfill God’s purposes for his life.

God has chosen him, King David, therefore to fight against him is to fight against God.

Because David is “set apart” or chosen by God, David can be certain that God hears his prayers and answers. Psalm 34:17

## Exposition (Continued)

“Be angry, and do not sin.

Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.” – v. 4

Since it is useless to oppose God’s anointed King, he will call on God who will help him, the rebellious are called to repent.

The phrase, “Be angry”, is not a good translation here. The Septuagint, Ethiopic, Syriac, Arabic, Vulgate, NKJV, Bisshop’s Bible, and ESV all have some form of “Be angry”. However, the KJV, Geneva, NASB, NIV, and ERV all translate the clause, “Tremble” or “Stand in awe”, which is the best translation, when the context is considered. The Apostle Paul appears to quote this verse, using the Septuagint translation, in Ephesians 4:26. But, “Paul does not give the words, “Be angry and sin not”, as a formal quotation, but introduces them just as if they were his own.” (Plumer, p.68) So, Paul does not appear to be quoting the clause as an inspired, correct translation, but as a phrase that fit his purpose or best expressed his point in context in Ephesians.

The Hebrew word is “ragaz”, which means any violent emotion, especially anger or fear – be afraid, stand in awe, quake, rage, shake, tremble. To translate the word “angry” is not relevant in context, but tremble is consistent with the last sentence of verse 4 and with verse 5. Those who are in rebellion are called to “tremble” or “stand in awe” of God, to not sin by their irreverence, and to think carefully about who God and their own souls. They are urged to meditate about these things on their beds – a place where they can be still and not disturbed by the business of the world and life in general, and also a place that brings them closest to the experience or reality of death, sleep. In fact, sleep is used frequently as a synonym for death in the Bible.

## Exposition (Continued)

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And put your trust in the LORD..” – v. 5

This is a call to faith. Sacrifices were both material – such as cattle, sheep, goats, and doves – and spiritual, such as prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and giving to the poor. 1 Peter 2:5; Psalm 50:8-15; Psalm 141:2; Psalm 107:22; Jeremiah 17:26; Psalm 51:17; Hebrews 13:15-16; Hosea 6:6. To offer sacrifice to God, either material or spiritual, first of all demands belief in God and surrender to Him expressed in repentance, or turning away from our natural sinful rebellion. Surrendering our souls, lives, hopes, dreams, comforts, pleasures, possessions to God in repentance and thankfulness constitute “sacrifices of righteousness”. These are the things the “righteous” do. And, they put their trust in God. They depend on Him and on Him alone for life after death. They depend on Him and on Him alone for truth and for direction in living. They depend on Him and on Him alone for freedom from slavery to sin and for forgiveness.

## Exposition (Continued)

### Application:

David's enemies give us a picture of the futility of opposing God's chosen King, the Lord Jesus Christ. All opposition to Christ is based on lies and carried out with lies. The result of man's efforts to oppose the work and purposes of God is wasted living and, ultimately, judgment. As God's chosen people, we can and should stir up our faith to trust Him to hear our prayers and answer. He has chosen us as His own people. He will most definitely hear our prayers.

Like David, we should urge unbelievers to tremble before God, to turn from unbelief and sin, and to trust in Christ.

### III. Contrast between the Desires of Men and the Blessings of God

*There are many who say,*

“Who will show us *any* good?” – v. 6

In the Hebrew, there is no word for “any”; it has been added in many translations. “Who will show us good?” is a more general question that does not imply a specific good thing or things; rather, the implication is a seeking after good in a broad sense, either materially or philosophically (spiritually). In context, the question most probably refers to pervasive good in all aspects of material, earthly life. The “many” who asked the question were quite probably those who followed Absalom, and he had promised the people an unspecified good, if he were made judge of Israel. (2 Samuel 15:1-4)

“LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.” – v. 6

Our sinful human nature causes us to desire material things, earthly comfort, and pleasure rather than the things of God. (Philippians 3:17-19) So, here David contrasts the desires of his enemies with the source of true good, which is the “countenance” of God. David calls on God to bless His people, even David’s enemies.

## Exposition (Continued)

The meaning of “lift up the light of your countenance” is to bless, which is the opposite of God hiding His face. (Numbers 6:25-26, Genesis 4:14, Deuteronomy 31:17-18)

This phrase does not imply an emotional feeling of mystically perceiving the “face” of God or a deep sense of the presence of God. Rather, it is God’s active revelation of Himself in our minds and hearts through His word and Spirit that results in growth in knowledge of God, obedience, and joy in knowing God. It is also experienced through God’s provision, guidance, and protection.

“You have put gladness in my heart,  
More than in the season that their grain and wine  
increased.  
I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;  
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”  
– vv.7-8

David gives testimony of three promises from God that results from God lifting up His countenance. Gladness, Isaiah 35:10, peace, Psalm 29:11, and safety, Deuteronomy 33:12, are all blessings David enjoyed even in the midst of the extremely serious troubles of his life.

## Exposition (Continued)

### Application:

If God blessed David with these things, which He did, then God can and will bless all of His people with gladness, peace, and safety. These are promises from God for His chosen people, who repent, trust in Christ, and worship and serve Him.