

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 4

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 4***

#### Overview

This Psalm might be called the “goodnight” psalm. Its intention is obviously to be read and used in the evening. It is meant to bring us to a place of trusting in God for all the cares and conflicts of the day that we are able to sleep peacefully. Many have pointed out that if we take Psalms 3 and 4 together, they would provide a morning psalm (Psalm 3:5) and an evening psalm (4:8). Psalm 4 is often used by our congregation when we follow the “Order of Evening Prayer”. It is also important to remember that this psalm is placed immediately after the psalm that dealt with David’s plea for the threat of Absalom. It comes really almost as a psalm of resolution in that context. Since God had answered David’s prayer of deliverance he may “both lie down and sleep in peace.”

The title of this psalm shows us that the psalms were meant to be sung. Additionally, that some psalms were written with specific instruments in mind. When we compare the title of Psalm 4 with the title of Psalm 5, we see that they were both written by David for the “director of music”<sup>1</sup>. Yet Psalm 4 is written to be sung to “stringed instruments”<sup>2</sup>, while Psalm 5 was written to be sung “to flutes”.

#### Structure of the Psalm

It is always tempting when you see those *selah* at the margin to divide the psalm according to their appearances. Yet, we should remember that those notes are probably musical notations and not content driven necessarily. So instead I offer up this outline for Psalm 4:

1. The Lord who answers in distress – 4:1-3
2. The psalmist’s trust in the Lord and advice to rebels – 4:4-5
3. Words and prayers of reconciliation – 4:6-8

---

<sup>1</sup> This title appears in the psalms 55 times and in Habakkuk 3:19.

<sup>2</sup> The stringed instruments of David’s day were the lute or lyre, which are similar to a harp though shaped differently.

### The Lord Who Answers in Distress – 4:1-3

- :1 - “relief from my distress” – The actual Hebrew here for “relief” is a word meaning “a wide open and enlarged space.” In **Ezra 10:9** it is used to describe a “plaza” or “square”. The same word and idea is brought out in **Psalms 18:19**.  
*How does the imagery conveyed by the Hebrew language actually fit what is really helpful in our distress?*
- :2 - Here David really addresses one of the temptations people have when they face distress or trying circumstances. Instead of turning to the true God, they turned to other things and other gods. When they gave in to those temptations they did two things:  
a. They stole from God the glory that was due to Him – **Isaiah 49:3**  
b. They employed other means that were nothing at all.  
*What are some of the false things people rely on to get them through distressful times?*
- :3 - This verse is the opposite of verse 2. If we will take our requests to the true God, the Lord will hear and answer. God has already set His people “apart” for Himself, thus making them “godly”. They don’t behave “godly” to be “set apart”. We are chosen by God not the other way around. So then, in recognition of our being set apart by God, we approach Him rather than the false notions/ideas of verse 2.

### The Psalmist’s Trust in the Lord and Advice to Rebels – 4:4-5

- :4 - “anger” – Once again the Hebrew word conveys deeper imagery and literally means “quakes” or “trembles”. The idea here being that we are so mad we are shaking. Paul recognizes the danger of going to bed angry and how anger builds in the darkness of the night. **Ephesians 4:26-27**  
*What do you think Paul means when he says, “give the devil a foothold”?*
- “search your hearts” – Not only are we not to be angry but we are to root out anger from our hearts. David is calling us to a true forgiveness for those who have wronged us.
- :5 - Offering “right sacrifices” follows from being the godly that God has set apart to Himself. It is a picture of the right relationship with God that is in opposition to the actions of those in verse 2.

## Words and Prayers of Reconciliation – 4:6-8

- :6 - David begins this verse with trying to express the thoughts of those who are experiencing distress. The question he poses probably crosses our lips a time or two. Yet, David's answer is a reflection on the Aaronic benediction. ***Numbers 6:24-26.***

*What does it mean to have the "Lord's face shine on us"?*

1. We are able to be in God's presence.
2. God receives our petition favorably

*How does the benediction at the end of church prepare us for the week ahead?*

- :7 - This is a celebration verse that God has answered the petition of the psalmist. He compares his joy at this moment with the joy of harvest festivals when there is "grain" and "new wine". ***See Deuteronomy 14:22-23; Ruth 3:7***

- While we don't have harvest festivals in the same way that the Israelites did, we might understand by thinking of the verse as the Lord filling us with joy like at Christmas or Easter.

- :8 - David closes out the psalm with a summary to sleep by. He will sleep peacefully because the Lord will watch over him and make him dwell in safety.

- What a wonderful way to end your day with the thought that God has all that is on my mind today and since I have given it over to him, I can lie down and sleep in peace.

*What keeps you from sleeping well?*

*How can this psalm become a bedtime prayer that gives you more peaceful sleep?*

Closing Prayer