

Psalms 102:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.

Analysis

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. This opening plea introduces one of Scripture's most poignant laments, titled 'A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.' The superscription identifies this as a prayer template for those experiencing crushing distress—whether individual or national suffering.

"Hear my prayer" (shim'ah t'fillati, שִׁמְעָה תְּפִלָּתִי) uses the imperative of shama (עַמְעָד), meaning to hear with intent to respond, not merely acknowledge. The psalmist demands God's attention, assuming covenant relationship grants the right to appeal to divine mercy. T'fillah (תְּפִלָּה) denotes intercessory prayer or petition, contrasting with praise or thanksgiving.

"Let my cry come unto thee" (v'shav'ati eleika tavo, וְשָׁבַעֲתִי אֲלֵיכֶם תָּבוֹא) intensifies the appeal. Shav'ah (שָׁבַעַת) means a cry for help, a desperate shout—not calm conversation but urgent pleading. The phrase "come unto thee" uses spatial language, personifying prayer as a messenger that must reach God's presence to be effective.

This verse establishes lament's legitimacy. The psalmist doesn't suppress anguish or feign contentment but brings raw pain to God. Biblical faith permits—even encourages—honest complaint, trusting that God can handle human emotion and will respond to sincere appeal.

Historical Context

Psalm 102 is one of seven 'Penitential Psalms' (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) traditionally used in confession and lament. While the superscription doesn't identify historical context, internal evidence suggests either individual suffering (illness, isolation, persecution) or national calamity (exile, Jerusalem's destruction).

Many scholars date Psalm 102 to the Babylonian exile (586-538 BC), when Jerusalem lay in ruins, the Temple was destroyed, and Israelites languished in captivity. Verses 13-22 particularly seem to address national restoration, praying for Zion's rebuilding. However, the psalm's universal language allowed subsequent generations to appropriate it for various afflictions.

The cry 'Hear my prayer' echoes throughout the Psalter (4:1, 39:12, 54:2, 61:1, 84:8, 143:1), reflecting Israel's confidence in covenant relationship. God had bound Himself by oath to hear His people's cries (Exodus 3:7-9, 22:23-24). Even when circumstances suggested divine abandonment, believers appealed to God's promises.

Hebrews 5:7 applies language reminiscent of this psalm to Jesus, who 'offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death.' Christ entered fully into human lament, validating honest expression of suffering while demonstrating trust in the Father's ultimate faithfulness.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the psalmist's boldness in demanding God's hearing inform our understanding of prayer as genuine relationship rather than religious performance?
2. What obstacles prevent contemporary believers from bringing 'desperate cries' to God rather than sanitized, theologically correct prayers?
3. How do we balance confident appeal to God's covenant promises with humble recognition that His timing and methods may differ from our expectations?

Interlinear Text

תָבוֹא: אֶל יְהֹוָה שִׁמְעֵנִי תְּפִלָתִי וְשִׁיעָתִי
O LORD Hear A Prayer and let my cry come
H3068 H8085 H8605 H7775 H413 H935

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 61:2 (Parallel theme): From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Psalms 18:6 (References Lord): In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Exodus 2:23 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage.

Hebrews 5:7 (Prayer): Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

Psalms 5:2 (Prayer): Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.

Psalms 143:7 (References Lord): Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.

Psalms 39:12 (Prayer): Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

Psalms 143:4 (Parallel theme): Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.

Luke 22:44 (Prayer): And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Lamentations 3:44 (Prayer): Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org