

Psalms 143:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

Analysis

Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. Psalm 143 opens with urgent appeal for God to hear and answer prayer, grounding this request not in the psalmist's worthiness but in God's faithfulness and righteousness. This is the last of seven Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) traditionally used in Christian liturgy to express repentance and dependence on God's mercy.

"Hear my prayer, O LORD" (יְהֹוָה שָׁמָע תְּפִלָּתִי/Yahweh shema tefillati) begins with direct address to Yahweh, using His covenant name. Shama means to hear, listen, pay attention, respond—not merely auditory awareness but hearing that leads to action. Tefillah (prayer) is general term for petition, intercession, worship. David appeals for God's attentive response to his prayer.

"Give ear to my supplications" (הָאָזִינָה אֶל-תְּחִנּוּנִי/ha'azinah el-tachanun) intensifies the appeal. Azan means to listen attentively, give ear, pay close attention. Tachanun means supplication, plea for grace, earnest petition. The parallel construction (hear...give ear; prayer...supplications) emphasizes urgency through repetition. David isn't making casual request but desperate, repeated appeal for divine attention and intervention.

"In thy faithfulness answer me" (בְּאִמּוֹתֶךָ עֲנוֹנִי/be'emunatekha aneni) grounds the appeal in God's character rather than human merit. Emunah means faithfulness, trustworthiness, steadfastness, reliability. This derives from aman (to be firm,

established, faithful)—the root of "amen." God's faithfulness refers to His covenant reliability, His unwavering commitment to His promises, His consistent character. David appeals to who God IS rather than what David deserves.

"And in thy righteousness" (בְּצִדְקָתֶךָ/betzidqatekha) adds parallel appeal. Tzedaqah means righteousness, justice, rightness, what is right and proper. This doesn't refer to stern legal judgment but to God's righteous character that includes both justice and mercy, that makes things right, that vindicates His people. God's righteousness ensures He will act consistently with His character and covenant promises.

Historical Context

Psalm 143, traditionally attributed to David, reflects circumstances of persecution and distress similar to Saul's pursuit or Absalom's rebellion. The psalm describes an enemy pursuing David's soul, smiting his life to the ground, making him dwell in darkness like the dead (v.3). Whether referring to specific historical crisis or expressing general experience of persecution, it captures the reality of desperate prayer during extreme adversity.

The appeal to God's faithfulness and righteousness rather than human merit reflects fundamental biblical theology. Salvation and deliverance rest on God's character, not human worthiness. Abraham believed God, "and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Israel's exodus from Egypt resulted from God's faithfulness to covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not from Israel's merit (Exodus 2:24). Throughout Scripture, God's people appeal to His faithful character as basis for answered prayer.

The Penitential Psalms tradition developed in early church liturgy as expressions of repentance during Lent and other penitential seasons. Psalm 143 particularly emphasizes human sinfulness ("in thy sight shall no man living be justified," v.2) and need for divine mercy. This reflects Reformation theology of justification by faith alone—righteousness based on God's character and Christ's work, not human merit.

The contrast between God's righteousness and human sinfulness appears throughout Scripture. Isaiah 64:6 confesses: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Romans 3:10 declares: "There is none righteous, no, not one." Yet Romans 3:21-22 reveals righteousness through faith in Christ: "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe."

For believers throughout history facing persecution, suffering, or spiritual darkness, this appeal to God's faithfulness and righteousness has provided foundation for confident prayer. When we have nothing else to offer, when circumstances seem hopeless, when enemies prevail, we can appeal to God's unchanging character—His faithfulness endures, His righteousness ensures He will act consistently with His nature and promises.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between appealing to God based on His faithfulness versus based on our own merit or worthiness?
2. How do God's faithfulness and righteousness work together in responding to our prayers?
3. Why does Scripture repeatedly emphasize that no one is righteous in God's sight, and how does this drive us to dependence on His righteousness?
4. How does the pattern of repeated appeals ('hear...give ear'; 'prayer...supplications') reflect appropriate urgency in prayer?
5. What does it mean practically to pray 'in' God's faithfulness and righteousness—how does this shape the content and confidence of prayer?

Interlinear Text

תִּחְנֹן־ אֶל־ פָּאֵז־ יְנָה־ תְּפִלַּת־ שָׁם־ עַיְלָה־ הָנָה־
O LORD Hear my prayer give ear to my supplications
H3068 H8085 H8605 H238 H413 H8469

בְּאִמְנָתֶךָ עֲבָדֶךָ בְּצִדְקָתֶךָ: אֶתְּנָא־ נִיְמָנָה
in thy faithfulness answer me and in thy righteousness
H530 H6030 H6666

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 71:2 (Righteousness): Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me.

Psalms 31:1 (Faith): In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

Psalms 140:6 (References Lord): I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.

1 John 1:9 (Faith): If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Daniel 9:16 (Righteousness): O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

2 Samuel 7:25 (References Lord): And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.