

Psalms 17:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.

Analysis

Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips. David opens this psalm with an urgent, threefold appeal for divine attention: "Hear," "attend," and "give ear." This rhetorical intensification—using three imperatives with three synonyms for prayer (tsedeq, "the right"; rinnah, "cry"; tefillah, "prayer")—expresses the psalmist's passionate desire to be heard by God.

"Hear the right" (shim'ah tsedeq, שִׁמְעָה צְדָקָה) is striking. David does not merely ask God to hear him but to hear "the right" or "righteousness." The Hebrew tsedeq can mean righteousness, justice, or a righteous cause. David appeals to God as the righteous Judge, confident that his cause is just. He is not praying for something contrary to God's righteous will but for vindication that aligns with divine justice.

"That goeth not out of feigned lips" (lo misifte mirmah, לֹא מִשְׁפְּתִי מִרְמָה) declares the sincerity of David's prayer. Mirmah means deceit, treachery, or fraud. Unlike flattery or manipulative prayer designed to deceive God, David's petition comes from genuine conviction. He prays what he truly believes, not what he thinks God wants to hear. This combination of righteous cause and sincere expression gives David confidence in approaching God.

The verse establishes the entire psalm's framework: a righteous man with a just cause, praying sincerely, appeals to the righteous Judge for vindication against

enemies. David's confidence rests not on his perfection but on his integrity—he genuinely seeks God and righteousness, unlike his deceitful opponents.

Historical Context

Psalm 17 belongs to the category of individual lament, specifically prayers for deliverance from enemies. The superscription identifies it as "A Prayer of David," suggesting it may have originated during one of David's many experiences of persecution—perhaps during Saul's pursuit, Absalom's rebellion, or another crisis when innocent suffering and false accusation threatened him.

The concept of sincere versus feigned prayer was central to Israel's prophetic critique of empty religion. Isaiah denounced those who drew near with their mouths while their hearts were far from God (Isaiah 29:13). Malachi condemned priests who offered defiled sacrifices while going through religious motions (Malachi 1:6-14). David's emphasis on unfeigned lips aligns with the broader biblical insistence that God desires truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6).

The practice of appealing to God as righteous Judge pervades the Psalter. When human justice systems fail—when the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper—God remains the ultimate court of appeal. David, having been anointed king yet hunted like an animal, had experienced profound injustice. His confidence that God would hear "the right" sustained him through years of exile and danger.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Why does David use three different imperatives and three different words for prayer in this opening verse?

2. What does it mean to pray 'the right' rather than simply praying for what you want?
3. How does praying with 'unfeigned lips' differ from praying what you think God wants to hear?
4. When have you appealed to God's righteousness when human justice failed you?

Interlinear Text

תִּפְלַת	בָּאָז	יִנְהָ	רִבְתָּת	וּ	פָּקַשׁ	יְבָה	אֵצֶל	יְהִי	הַ	שָׁמַע	הַ
Hear	O LORD	the right	attend		unto my cry		give ear		A Prayer		
H8085	H3068	H6664	H7181		H7440		H238		H8605		
that goeth not	lips	out of feigned									
H3808	H8193	H4820									

מְרַמָּה:

שְׁפָתִת

בְּלֹא

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 142:6 (Parallel theme): Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

Psalms 61:1 (Prayer): Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.

1 John 3:21 (Parallel theme): Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Psalms 145:18 (References Lord): The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

Matthew 15:8 (Parallel theme): This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

Isaiah 29:13 (References Lord): Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Psalms 86:1 (References Lord): Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy.

Psalms 140:12 (References Lord): I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

Psalms 7:8 (References Lord): The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.

Psalms 18:44 (Parallel theme): As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me.

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