

Psalms 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

Analysis

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. This opening petition establishes the psalm's framework of confident appeal based on past deliverance. David addresses God as "God of my righteousness" (elohei tzidqi, אֱלֹהֵי צִדְקָה), a remarkable possessive phrase suggesting God is both the source and vindicator of David's righteousness.

The phrase "God of my righteousness" carries profound theological weight. This is not self-righteousness but divinely imputed righteousness—God who declares David righteous through covenant relationship. The genitive construction indicates God is David's righteousness (cf. Jeremiah 23:6, "The LORD Our Righteousness"). This anticipates New Testament teaching that Christ becomes our righteousness through faith (1 Corinthians 1:30). David's confidence in prayer rests not on personal merit but on God's covenant faithfulness.

"Thou hast enlarged me" (hirchavta li, הִרְחַבְתָּ לִי) uses the verb rachav, meaning to make wide, give space, bring relief. The perfect tense indicates completed action—God has already delivered David from tight places. When "in distress" (batzar, בָּצָר), literally "in tightness" or "in a narrow place," God brought David into "a broad place" (Psalm 18:19). This spatial metaphor depicts deliverance from constriction to freedom, from pressure to relief, from danger to safety. Ancient Near Eastern imagery often portrayed distress as being trapped in narrow spaces,

while deliverance meant entering spacious, open territory.

The transition from past deliverance ("thou hast enlarged") to present petition ("have mercy... hear my prayer") models biblical prayer—remembering God's past faithfulness strengthens confidence for present needs. The Hebrew chanan (חֲנָן, "have mercy") means to show favor, be gracious, demonstrate undeserved kindness. David appeals to God's character, not his own worthiness. This pattern of prayer—recalling God's nature and past acts before making requests—appears throughout Scripture and teaches believers to ground petitions in divine character rather than human merit.

Historical Context

Psalm 4, attributed to David and designated for "the chief Musician on Neginoth" (stringed instruments), belongs to the category of evening psalms. Its superscription connects it to temple worship, where it would be sung accompanied by harps and lyres. The historical context likely involves threats from enemies during David's reign—possibly Absalom's rebellion or another crisis when opposition questioned David's legitimacy and righteousness.

The phrase "God of my righteousness" is particularly significant given David's role as Israel's anointed king. As God's chosen representative, David's righteousness was regularly challenged by opponents who questioned his right to rule. Saul hunted him as a fugitive, Absalom usurped his throne, and various adversaries accused him of wrongdoing. Against these challenges, David appeals to God as the ultimate judge and vindicator of his righteousness. This wasn't claiming moral perfection but affirming covenant standing—God had chosen, anointed, and established David despite his flaws.

The metaphor of being "enlarged" from distress resonated powerfully in ancient warfare. Military enemies would surround, besiege, and trap opponents in tight positions. David's years as a fugitive involved hiding in caves, narrow ravines, and wilderness strongholds—literal tight places. God's deliverance meant escape from encirclement, breaking through enemy lines, finding refuge in open territory. For Christians facing spiritual opposition, the imagery remains apt: Satan seeks to hem

believers into narrow places of fear, doubt, and sin, while God's deliverance brings freedom, peace, and assurance.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God as 'the God of my righteousness' free you from both self-righteousness and self-condemnation?
2. What past deliverances can you recall where God 'enlarged' you from distress, and how does remembering these strengthen present faith?
3. How does David's pattern of prayer—recalling past faithfulness before making requests—shape your own prayer life?
4. In what 'tight places' do you currently feel trapped, and how does God's promise to bring you into a 'broad place' encourage you?
5. How does appealing to God's character ('have mercy') rather than your own worthiness change the nature and confidence of prayer?

Interlinear Text

me when I call	Hear	O God	of my righteousness	me when I was in distress
H7121	H6030	H430	H6664	H6862

thou hast enlarged	HO	have mercy	upon me and hear	my prayer
H7337		H2603	H8085	H8605

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 1:10 (Parallel theme): Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Psalms 25:16 (Grace): Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.

Psalms 119:132 (Grace): Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

Jeremiah 23:6 (Righteousness): In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Isaiah 45:24 (Righteousness): Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.

Psalms 17:6 (References God): I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech.

Habakkuk 3:19 (References God): The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Psalms 45:1 (Parallel theme): My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

Psalms 57:1 (Grace): Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

Psalms 143:2 (Righteousness): And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.