

Fact Sheet for **“Give Ear to My Words, O LORD”**
Psalm 5

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The Psalms are a very different kind of biblical literature from letters of Paul to the early church. The Psalms are poetry. They are the language of the heart, of emotion. They speak to our hearts when life gets tough, when we are struck by our own sinfulness, when our inward yearning is to be more dedicated to God, and when we are so filled with the joy of our salvation that it can't help but to spill out in our thoughts and words. It's not surprising then that so many songs and choruses that we sing take their wording from some portion of this book. I have chosen eight Psalms for this series, each having a song that we are familiar with. The first is Psalm 5. Begin by reading the first three verses from the King James Version. This Psalm actually begins with what is called a superscription. In the King James it reads, "To the chief Musician upon Nehiloth (*Ne-hie-lothe*), A Psalm of David." This musical instrument is mentioned only here in the Bible. Easton's Bible Dictionary describes it this way... 'It is probably derived from a root meaning "to bore," "perforate," and hence denotes perforated wind instruments of all kinds.' This is why this superscription in the English Standard Version (ESV) reads "*To the choirmaster: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.*"

**¹ Give ear to my words, O LORD;
consider my groaning.**

First, you may notice that the word LORD is written in all capital letters. This is an indicator that the word being translated is not "Adonai" but "Yahweh", the name God gave himself with Moses at the burning bush... translated also "I am". Second, I mentioned before that the Psalms are poetry, but a different kind of poetry than we are usually familiar with. Our poetry usually rhymes in sound, like in Limericks. Hebrew poetry on the other hand doesn't rhyme in sound. Instead it rhymes in thought.

The two lines of Psalm 5:1 say much the same thing in two different ways... "Give ear" & "consider" and "my words" & "my groaning". The word translated "my groaning" in the ESV and "my meditation" in the KJV refers to the whispering or the musing we can find ourselves doing when we are deep in prayer. It reminds me of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:12-13). Verse two says much the same thing as verse 1, but in a different way. Again it is the rhyme of thought.

**² Give attention to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you do I pray.**

Then verse three reads...

**³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.**

Notice that the word "morning" is repeated. When David woke up in the morning his thoughts and prayers turned to the LORD. What a great way to start the day!

Now... the ESV has the words "I prepare a sacrifice". The KJV has the words "I will direct *my prayer*". The NIV has "I lay my requests". The NET Bible has "I will present my case". These are all different! Are they translating a different word? The answer is "no". They are all translating the same Hebrew word. What is interesting is that a literal translation of that word is none of these. Instead it means "to lay out, to prepare, to put in order". The translation of this word, whenever it is translated, has to take its meaning from the context. It could refer to properly setting dishes on a table, or arranging wood on an altar, or presenting a case before a judge, or here praying thoughtfully and coherently. I think in this case the KJV rendering "I will direct *my prayer*" best fits the context. David was not just praying words, or repeating the same words over and over again. David was carefully and thoughtfully arranging his prayer to God.

Incidentally you will notice that the words “*my prayer*” in the KJV are italicized. This is because these words are understood from context and not a strict translation of the Hebrew word.

Verse three ends with the words “and watch” in the ESV and “will look up” in the KJV. David was not only presenting his prayer before the LORD, he was also watching for God’s response. He was looking up to God. Now David continued this poetic Psalm with not a rhyme in similarity, but a rhyme in contrast.

- ⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.**
- ⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.**
- ⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.**

Was David experiencing these things in real time from others as he wrote this Psalm? Or was David contrasting those who sought after God with those who did not? It could be both. He does mention his enemies in verse eight. But you can also hear echoes of David saying, “I will not be this kind of person!” Now in this Psalm David switches back to the drum beat of his own heart.

- ⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.**

He mentions God’s house and the temple, but this doesn’t mean that the Jerusalem temple had already been built by Solomon. The Hebrew word for temple is also used of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3). The word “house” can also refer to the tabernacle (Joshua 6:24; 1 Samuel 1:24).

- ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.**

The word translated “make... straight” is the same word as in Proverbs 3:5-6.

- ⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.**
- ¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.**

Then David once more returns to those whose hope is in the LORD. This again is a rhyme in contrast.

- ¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.**
- ¹² For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.**

After reading this Psalm ask yourself, “What is the beat of my own heart?” Is it like David’s? What would you like it to be? How are you going to make those necessary changes to get it there? How should we pray for our families, friends, political leaders, etc. based on this Psalm? Sing the first three verses of this Psalm from the KJV as a prayer to close this study.