

## Introduction

A call for help in a time of distress. The obstacles are great, yet Yaakov's God can still provide salvation.

**For the leader. A psalm of David.** *May God answer you in time of trouble, the name of Jacob's God keep you safe— sending you help from the sanctuary, and sustaining you from Zion. May [God] receive the tokens of all your grain offerings, and approve your burnt offerings. Selah. May your desire be granted, your every plan fulfilled. May we shout for joy in your victory, arrayed by standards in the name of our God. May God fulfill your every wish. Now I know that God will give victory to our anointed one, will answer him from the heavenly sanctuary with the mighty victories of God's right arm. They [call] on chariots, they [call] on horses, but we call on the name of the Eternal our God. They collapse and lie fallen, but we rally and gather strength. Lord, grant victory to the king; may [God] answer us when we call.*

לְמַנְצֵחַ מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד: יַעֲנֵךְ י-הוה בְּיוֹם  
צָרָה יִשְׁגָּבֶךָ שֵׁם אֱ-לֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב: יִשְׁלַח־עֲזָרְךָ  
מִקְדָּשׁ וּמִצִּיּוֹן יִסְעָדֶךָ: יִזְכֹּר כָּל־מִנְחֹתֶיךָ  
וְעוֹלֹתֶיךָ יְדַשְׁנָה סֶלָה: יִתְּרֶלֶךָ כְּלָבֶבְךָ  
וְכָל־עֲצָתְךָ יִמְלֵא: נְרַנְנָה בִישׁוּעֹתֶיךָ וּבְשֵׁם  
אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ נִדְגַל יִמְלֵא י-הוה כָּל־שִׂאֲלוֹתֶיךָ:  
עֲתָה יְדַעְתִּי כִי הוֹשִׁיעַ י-הוה מְשִׁיחוֹ  
יַעֲנֵהוּ מְשִׁמֵי קִדְשׁוֹ בְּגִבְרֹת יֵשַׁע יְמִינוֹ:  
אֵלֶּה בָּרֶכֶב וְאֵלֶּה בַּסּוּסִים וְאֶנְחֵנוּ בְשֵׁם  
י-הוה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר: הִמָּה כָּרְעוּ וְנָפְלוּ  
וְאֶנְחֵנוּ קָמְנוּ וּנְתַעֲרֹד: י-הוה הוֹשִׁיעָה  
הַמְּלִיךָ יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם־קִרְאָנוּ: (תהלים כ)

This Psalm, familiar from the daily morning prayers, begins in second-person tense as an appeal for someone else in distress. We pray for God to: “Answer you...Keep you safe...Send you help...Grant your desire,” and so on. (יענה, ישגבך, ישלח־עזרה, יתורלך כלבבך.) The last three verses, depicting redemption, are phrased in first person plural. “We call on the name of God” (ואנחנו בשם ה' נזכיר), “We will gather strength” (המלך יעננו), “The King will answer our call” (ואנחנו קמנו ונתערוד). This is the ultimate expression of empathy: We pray for someone else and see their salvation as our own. Whether we are praying for ourselves or someone else, it is always meaningful to include others in need.

Verse 2 invokes “Yaakov's God” (שם אלהי יעקב). Why do we single out this forefather, Yaakov Avinu, in particular? Yaakov's life was full of stressful moments: with his brother Esav, with his father-in-law Lavan, and through various incidents with his wives & children. In the Torah, Yaakov gives praise to “God who answered me on the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone” (לאֵל־ל הענה אתי) (Breishit 35:3). The commentators explain that Yaakov's story inspires our own. Just as our ancestor was redeemed after calling out to God, so too can we find deliverance in our time of distress.