

THE BOOK OF PSALMS
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PSALM 13: WHEN GOD IS SILENT

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

1	<i>How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?</i>	The pain
2	<i>How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?</i>	
3	<i>Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,</i>	
4	<i>lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.</i>	The prayer
5	<i>But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.</i>	The praise
6	<i>I will sing to the Lord, Because he has dealt bountifully with me.</i>	

Introduction to Psalm 13

- “The three pairs of verses climb up from the depths to a fine vantage-point of confidence and hope. If the path is prayer (3), the sustaining energy is the faith expressed in verse 5. The prospect from the summit (5) is exhilarating, and the retrospect (6) overwhelming.” (Tyndale, 1:77)
- This Psalm may be mapped out as shown below.

verses 1-2	complaining to God	feeling wretched	the pressure of the situation
verses 3-4	seeking answers from God	pleading for relief	defying the situation
verses 5-6	rejoicing trust in God	finding joy	rising above the situation

- “There is a sense in which trust implies a quiet, relaxed resting in God (Isaiah 30:15). It excludes efforts to fix things ourselves,...Psalm 13 shows that trust does not issue in insistent questioning of God that asked why God is ignoring us and our need, and in urgent pressing of God to give us attention and brighten our eyes with the promise of action. As before, this action does not belong just in the general great past and the eschatological future. It belongs now.” (Goldingay, 1:209)
- Psalm 13 is the shortest of all the psalms of help in the book.

Outline of Psalm 13

When God is silent (Psalm 13)

- I. The pain (verses 1-2)
- II. The prayer (verses 3-4)
- III. The praise (verses 5-6)

Notes on Psalm 13

The pain (verses 1-2)

1 *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

- *Will you forget me forever?* David is looking to God as the source of his trouble. *Forever* means “continually” or “utterly.”
- The question *How long, O LORD?* in Hebrew is more literally *Until when, Yahweh?* It is asked four times in the first two verses.

<i>Until when?</i>		
The Lord asks men the question	Men ask the Lord the question	Men ask men the question
Exodus 16:28; Numbers 14:11	Psalm 13:2, 3; Jeremiah 47:8; Habakkuk 1:2	Joshua 18:3; Job 18:2; 19:2; Psalm 62:3

- *Forget.* This is not a reference to some mental lapse but a present reference to the Lord’s commitment to His covenant obligations to His people. The concept of God forgetting is used in the following manner:
 - God should not forget the sufferer but intervene in deliverance (1 Samuel 1:11; Psalms 10:12; 74:23)
 - God forgetting has an element of protest in it (Psalms 13:1; 42:9; 44:24; 77:9; Isaiah 49:14; Lamentations 5:20)
 - It is used in a positive sense in that God does not forget his own (Psalm 9:12; 10:11; Deuteronomy 4:31)
 - God is the subject of forgetting also in Psalm 77:10, 15; Hosea 4:6; Amos 8:7.
- *Hide your face.* This is an idiom that symbolizes broken communion between God and man (Isaiah 53:3; 59:2). Not to hide one’s face pictures full and open communion (Job 13:20; Psalms 22:24; Psalm 102:1-2). There are many facets to God hiding his face found in Scripture.
 1. God hid his face because of sin (Deuteronomy 31:17-18; 32:20; Isaiah 8:17; 54:8; 57:17; 59:2; Jeremiah 33:5; Ezekiel 39: 23-24; Micah 3:4)
 2. There is a deep trust that God has not hidden his face (Psalm 22:24)

3. Prayers were offered up to God for Him not to hide His face (Psalm 27:9; 69:17; 102:2; 143:7)
 4. Prayer was also given for God to hide His face from sins committed (Psalm 51:9).
 5. The question was asked why God is hiding His face (Psalm 88:14; Job 13:24; Psalm 13:1; 44:24)
 6. The result of God hiding His face was dismay (Job 34:29; Psalms 30:7; 104:29; Isaiah 60 4:7)
 7. The wicked believe that God has hidden His face from their sins (Psalm 10:11)
 8. God says He will not hide His face (Ezekiel 30 9:29).
 9. David says that he longs for God's face (Psalms 11:7; 17:15; 27:4, 8; 34:5)
- The two questions mean: "This is intolerable and needs to stop *now*." (Goldingay, 1:205)

**2 *How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?***

- In verse 1, David is asking questions of God; in verse 2 David is asking questions of himself.
- *Council* is the "turmoil of the plot rather than the dull ache of dejection." (Tyndale, 1:77) See also Psalm 77:3-6. This phraseology expresses the concept of worry.
- *Sorrow*. The primary meaning is a mental trouble that result from affliction.
- The text does not identify the *enemy*. Suggestions have been Saul, Absalom, an illness that leads to death, or even death itself. Whatever it is the ascendancy of the enemy is causing personal humiliation to David, threatens him personally, and threatens the faith he has in God to bring justice.
- *How long shall my enemy be exalted over me*. From David's perspective it appears as though his enemies are being more blessed by God than himself.
- "The psalmist is alone, and suffering in loneliness aggravates the anguish." (EBC, 5:140)
- "When the Lord has forgotten his covenant child, an opponent becomes a greater threat to that child's well-being. The smallest problem takes on greater significance. The psalmist is disturbed in his deepest being by God's lack of interest, by the adversaries (adversities), and by his own feelings." (EBC, 5:140)

The prayer (verses 3-4)

**3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,**

- There are three imperatives that are directed toward a God in this verse: *consider*, *answer*, and *light up*.
- In the Hebrew, there is no *and* between *consider* and *answer*. This “conveys a sense of urgency that ignores politeness.” (Goldingay, 1:207)
- *Consider* means “to look, to regard.” This imperative is directed to God in Psalms 13:3; 74:20; 80:14; 84:9; 142:4; Isaiah 63:15; 64:9; Lamentations 1:11; 2:20; 3:63; 5:1. “Divine abandonment and alienation made the psalmist experience despair, but God’s ‘look,’ expressive a favor, renews life.” (EBC, 5:141)
- *Answer me*. This imperative to God is found in Psalms 4:1; 13:3; 27:7; 55:2; 60:7; 69:13, 16; 86:1; 102:2; 108:6; 119:145; 143:1, 7; 147:7. God answers when we call on Him, not merely after we call (Isaiah 58:9). “The answer is a positive message of God’s favor by which the Lord frees his servant from the causes of the anguish of the soul.” (EBC, 5:141)
- *Light up my eyes*. Bright eyes suggests encouragement (Psalm 19:8; 118:27; Ezra 9:8; 1Samuel 1:21-22). “A man it relieved from troubles and blessed with God’s protection, peace, and favor shows his inner spiritual condition in his outward appearance (cf. 36:8-9; 1 Samuel 14:20 7, 29). His eyes sparkle with God’s grace. On the other hand, the experience of anguish is expressed by the dimness of the eyes (cf. 6:7; 38:10).” (EBC, 5:141) This imperative is directed towards God in Psalms 13:3; 31:16; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135; Daniel 9:17. In all instances but Psalm 13:3 the object is God’s face to shine on the person.
- *My God*. Notice very well the little word *my*. Although David feels abandoned by God, God is still his God and he looks to Him in faith and trust and hope.
- *Death* (Hebrew *mowet*) and the verb for *shaken* (*môt*) come from the same family of words. “Translations render the final verb ‘I am shaken,’ but the verb refers to dying; it suggests falling down to the ground and not getting up again, not merely shaking or stumbling so as to rise again.” (Goldingay, 1:208)

**4 lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.**

- Speaking of verses 3-4: “Whether verse 3 means that illness was the cause or the effect of this low ebb in David’s affairs, these two verses show what were the two poles of his world: God, but for whom life would be insupportable, and the enemy, because of whom any wavering (4b) must be unthinkable. Awareness of God and the enemy is virtually the hallmark of every psalm of David; the positive and negative charge which produced the driving force of his best years.” (Tyndale, 1:77-78)

- *I have prevailed*. This is also translated “overcome” and was used of men wrestling or battling (Genesis 32:25).
- *Shaken*. This verb is used in contexts of things which are solid and secure: The earth and mountains will not be moved (Psalms 46:2; 93:1; 96:10; 104:5); Leviathan is immovable (Job 41:15); the habitation of God will not be moved (Psalm 46:6); and God will not allow the righteous to be moved (Psalms 15:5; 16:8; 17:5; 21:7; 55:22; 62:2, 6; 66:9; 112:6; 121:3; 125:1; Proverbs 10:30; 12:3; Isaiah 54:10).

The verb also speaks of things which are insecure and will be moved. The wicked (Deuteronomy 32:35); kingdoms (Psalm 36:7); and idols that have to be nailed to a platform lest they topple (Isaiah 41:7). Although the earth will not be moved, God does move it to show His great power (Psalms 60:4; 82:5; Isaiah 24:19). The righteous are secure in God, yet they will also recognize their dependence on Him so as not to be moved from Him (Psalms 30:6; 38:16; 94:18).

In Psalm 10:6, the wicked say they will not be shaken by God; here David, a son of God, is on the verge of being shaken by the wicked.

- “This is a state in which Hope despairs, and yet Despair hopes at the same time” (Martin Luther).

The praise (verses 5-6)

5 *But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*

- *But I* is emphatic.
- *Have trusted*. This expresses a “sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence.” (TWOT)
- *Steadfast love*. The thing David trusts in is not his own abilities, but in the *steadfast love* of the Lord. **Hesed from another Psalm.**
- *Shall rejoice*. This refers to vigorous, enthusiastic expressions of joy. We express joy in God’s work in general (Psalm 118:24), His restoration of His people (Isaiah 49:13), His deliverance and protection from enemies (Psalm 9:14; 31:7-8); His glory and judgment (Psalm 97:8), and His rule (1 Chronicles 16:31). Here, David is rejoice in God’s *salvation*. Usually, this word is used to describe *salvation* from enemies and deliverance from real trouble. In the Psalms, it rarely has spiritual significance attached to it. Rejoicing in God’s salvation is found in 1 Samuel 2:1; 2 Chronicles 6:41; Psalms 9:14; 13:5; 14:7; 35:9; 40:16; 53:6; 70:4; Isaiah 25:9; 61:10; Habakkuk 3:18; Zechariah 9:9.
- “So the psalmist entrusts himself to this pledge to love, and turns his attention not to the quality of his faith but to its object and its outcome, which he has every intention of enjoying.” (Tyndale, 1:78)

6 *I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

- *I will sing* is a cohortative (**cohortative stuff from somewhere**).
- *He has dealt bountifully.*
 - *Dealt bountifully.* This verb has the idea of completeness. God dealing bountifully with people is found in Psalms 13:6; 103:10; 116:7; Isaiah 63:7.
 - “Yahweh bestows his benefits, not in small measure, but in fullness so as to give his children the experience of complete and free deliverance (116:7; 119:17).” (EBC, 5:142)
- “By nature we do not acknowledge that God cares for us in our afflictions; but by faith we lay hold of His invisible providence.” (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 1:180).

Applying Psalm 13