

“HOW LONG, O LORD?”

Psalm 13

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

This is a psalm of lament. Have you ever found yourself in the depths of despair? You’ve tried everything you know and there just does not seem to be any solution in sight. David was in that place. Yet he learned how to seek God out of the depths of his despair, and his despair soon turned into confident trust and rejoicing in the Lord’s bounty. As Kidner states, “The prospect from the summit (5) is exhilarating, and the retrospect (6) [looking back from future deliverance in the light of past deliverances] is overwhelming.” *The psalm begins with **high emotion** but ends with calm assurance*. Del. expresses the thought beautifully: “This song as it were casts up constantly lessening waves, until it becomes still as the sea when smooth as a mirror, and the only motion discernible at last is that of the joyous ripple of calm repose”

So it must be in your life.

YOU MUST NOT REMAIN IN THE PIT OF DESPAIR WHEN THE LORD PROVIDES DELIVERANCE!

I. THE BELIEVER’S DESOLATION AND DISTRESS (1-2)

Four times he cries out, “HOW LONG?”

“It is a long and weary struggle, it is a daily and hourly martyrdom; and wrestling with his despair, he can but cry (like the souls under the altar, Rev. vi. 10), How long?”

A. In Relation to God.

1. You seem to forget me
2. Your face seems to be hidden from me

When going through the trial, the believer sees God (as Luther shows) as “alienated, hostile, implacable, inexorable, whose wrath is (like Himself) eternal.” In such a state, **“Hope despairs, and yet Despair hopes at the same time; and all that lives is ‘the groaning that cannot be uttered,’ wherewith the Holy Spirit maketh intercession for us, brooding over the waters shrouded in darkness, to use the expression in Gen. 1. This no one understands who has not tasted it.”** [Luther, quoted in Perowne, p. 180]

B. In Relation to Himself

1. I keep putting counsels, plans, in my soul (during the night) that do not work. He experiences helpless embarrassment. Plan after plan must be abandoned. As Luther notes, “His heart is like a raging sea, in which all sorts of counsels move up and down; he tires on all hands to find a hole through which he can make his escape; he thinks on various plans and is still utterly at a loss what to advise” (quoted in Perowne, p. 181).
2. I have sorrows in my heart all the day.

- C. In Relation to his Adversaries--I must continually deal with my enemy exalting himself over me. David's concern was:
- His "personal humiliation"
 - Threat to his kingly power—David being "shaken" (4b)
 - Attack on his faith in divine justice

For the circumstances in David's life, consider the period when fleeing from Saul: refuge among the Moabites, in the wilderness of Ziph, an outlaw hiding in the cave of Adullam, and finally a captain in the service of the king of the Philistines. Yet, concluding that "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul."

What will the believer do in such times of despair? Is there any hope?

II. THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER (3-4)

David asks "Yahweh my Elohim" **three** things and then states **three** possible consequences if Yahweh does not grant him these three things.

A. Three Requests

1. Look at me (instead of hiding your face).
2. Answer me (instead of forgetting me).
3. Enlighten my eyes—I am losing my vital energy and am about to totally collapse or die; see I Sam. 14:27, 29 when Jonathan's eyes were brightened once he had eaten some honey. David feels in danger of having "the lamp of life within him go out entirely."

B. Three Possible consequences

1. "Lest I sleep [the sleep of] death
2. "Lest my enemy say 'I have overcome him'"
3. "Lest my adversaries rejoice when I am shaken"

III. THE BELIEVER'S CONFIDENCE AND CERTAINTY (5-6)

A. God's Part in Such Confidence and Certainty

1. His nature—who He is

- He is Yahweh—the faithful God of His covenant.
- He is characterized by "loyal-love"—*chesed*.

Because of who He is, He takes certain actions on behalf of His people.

2. His actions—what He does

- He saves: "your salvation"
- He "deals bountifully" with His own due to His amazing grace. This word shows that God gives to exceed man's asking.
- All that David speaks of here has not yet been completely fulfilled; some of it he looks forward to with great anticipation.

- B. Man's Part in Such Confidence and Certainty [Notice the very emphatic "I"—in contrast to all that the enemy and circumstances can do.
1. His trust in the Lord—past tense; *he has trusted and then is able to continue to rejoice and sing in the Lord!*
 2. His "rejoicing" and "shout for joy"
The enemy cannot control the **reactions of David's heart**; despite tremendous pressures and conflicts, David, not the enemy, determines his response, and David is able to make the proper response because of who God is and what God has done.
 3. His singing
David "trusts himself to this pledged love" of God, and he "turns his attention not to the quality of his faith but to its **object** (God) and its outcome (salvation) which he has every intention of enjoying" ("Rejoice in"; "sing to").

CONCLUSION

Leupold says: "Faith has climbed out of the lowest depths of despair where it had well-nigh perished into the full sunlight of godly hope" (p. 136).

"The Ps. Ends, the very rhythm of the words conspiring as it were with the sense of peace in the singer's breast, and the waves of song, stirred so tumultuously at the beginning, sinking down into the breathless calm of an unruffled sea" (Perowne, p. 182).

YOU MUST NOT REMAIN IN THE PIT OF DESPAIR WHEN THE LORD PROVIDES DELIVERANCE!