

Psalm 10:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?

Analysis

Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble? Psalm 10 continues the acrostic pattern begun in Psalm 9, suggesting they originally formed one composition. However, the tone shifts dramatically from celebration to complaint. David now questions why God seems absent precisely when His presence is most needed.

"Why standest thou afar off" (lamah Yahweh ta'amod berachok, למה יהוה立ム遠) employs the interrogative lamah (why?) to express perplexity and anguish. Amad (to stand) suggests God standing at a distance, uninvolved, observing from afar rather than intervening. Berachok (at a distance, far off) intensifies the sense of divine remoteness. The question is not philosophical but existential—David needs God's help but perceives Him as distant.

"Why hidest thou thyself" (ta'lim, מעלים) uses alam, meaning to hide, conceal, or veil oneself. God's hiddenness is a recurring theme in lament psalms (13:1, 22:1, 27:9, 44:24, 69:17, 88:14). This is not atheistic denial of God's existence but anguished protest at His perceived inaction. The righteous sufferer knows God is there but cannot perceive His presence or activity.

"In times of trouble" (le'ittot batzarah, לעתות בצרה) repeats the phrase from 9:9. There, God was declared a refuge in times of trouble; here, He seems to hide in those very times. This creates theological tension: the doctrine declares God's nearness; experience suggests His absence. Rather than suppressing this tension,

David brings it directly to God in prayer. Authentic faith includes honest questioning.

The verse models faithful lament—bringing doubts, fears, and complaints to God rather than away from Him. The question "why?" presupposes relationship and accountability. David interrogates God precisely because he believes God is present, powerful, and good, even though circumstances suggest otherwise.

Historical Context

The experience of divine hiddenness troubled Israel throughout its history. Job felt God had hidden from him (Job 13:24, 23:8-9). Isaiah lamented: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself" (Isaiah 45:15). The exile intensified this experience—where was God when Jerusalem fell, the temple burned, and the people were deported?

Yet Scripture also explains God's hiddenness. Sometimes God hides His face because of sin (Isaiah 59:2, Micah 3:4). Other times, hiddenness is a test of faith (Deuteronomy 31:17-18). Occasionally, God appears to hide to draw His people into deeper seeking (Song of Solomon 5:6). The tension is that God promises never to forsake His people (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5) yet sometimes seems conspicuously absent.

The lament psalm tradition gave Israel permission to voice these perplexities directly to God. Rather than demanding stoic acceptance or suppression of doubts, the Psalms model bringing our hardest questions into God's presence. The very act of questioning God in prayer demonstrates faith—we question the One we believe is there and is good, even when we cannot perceive Him.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between questioning God (as David does here) and doubting God's existence or goodness?
2. How can believers hold together the doctrine of God's nearness with the experience of His apparent absence?
3. Why might God 'hide Himself' during times of trouble, and what purposes might this serve?
4. How does bringing our 'why' questions directly to God in prayer function as an act of faith?

Interlinear Text

לְעֵת וֹתְךָ תִּלְעַל יְמִינְךָ בָּרוּךְ וְקָדוֹם דָּבָר מִתְּעַמֵּד ! הָיוּה לְמַה הָ

H4100 O LORD H3068 Why standest H5975 thou afar off H7350 why hidest H5956 thou thyself in times H6256

בְּצָרָה:

of trouble

H6869

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:1 (Parallel theme): My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Psalms 27:9 (Parallel theme): Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Jeremiah 14:8 (Parallel theme): O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?

Psalms 88:14 (References Lord): LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?

Psalms 44:24 (Parallel theme): Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?

Psalms 30:7 (References Lord): LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.

Psalms 46:1 (Parallel theme): God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Job 13:24 (Parallel theme): Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?

Job 34:29 (Parallel theme): When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only: