

Psalms 13:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long
wilt thou hide thy face from me?

Analysis

How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? This opening verse immediately plunges into anguished lament, characterized by the repeated question "How long?" (ad-anah, עַד־אָנָה)—asked four times in verses 1-2. This is the cry of faith stretched thin but not broken. David does not question whether God exists but why He seems absent. The complaint is directed to God, not about God, which distinguishes authentic lament from unbelief.

"Wilt thou forget me" (tishkacheni, תִשְׁכַּחַנִּי) uses a verb meaning to forget, overlook, or ignore. This is not accusation of divine failure but the expression of how abandonment feels. God's omniscience means He cannot literally forget, yet His apparent non-intervention feels like forgetfulness to the sufferer. The prophet Zion cried similarly: "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" (Isaiah 49:14), to which God responded: "Can a woman forget her sucking child? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15).

"For ever?" (lanetzach, לְעוֹלָה) intensifies the anguish. While David knows intellectually that God's abandonment cannot be permanent, suffering distorts time perception—the present pain feels eternal. This hyperbole of suffering appears throughout lament psalms, expressing emotional reality rather than theological conclusion.

"How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" introduces the metaphor of God's

face, central to biblical theology of divine presence. God's face turned toward His people signifies favor, blessing, and presence (Numbers 6:25-26: "The LORD make his face shine upon thee"). God hiding His face indicates withdrawal of perceived favor and felt presence. Moses pleaded: "shew me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). Job complained: "Wherefore hidest thou thy face?" (Job 13:24). The psalmist's greatest terror is not suffering itself but suffering without God's manifest presence.

Historical Context

Psalm 13 is a Davidic psalm, part of the collection attributed to King David. The superscription "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David" indicates it was used in Israel's corporate worship, suggesting David's personal crisis became the community's prayer. The historical occasion is unspecified, but the language suggests prolonged suffering—not acute crisis but chronic difficulty. Scholars propose various settings: David's fugitive years fleeing Saul, Absalom's rebellion, or illness.

The "How long?" question appears frequently in lament psalms (6:3, 35:17, 79:5, 80:4, 89:46, 90:13, 94:3). This literary formula characterizes the lament genre, which comprises approximately one-third of the Psalter. Israel's worship made space for honest expression of pain, confusion, and protest before God—a striking contrast to pagan religions that demanded unquestioning submission or magical manipulation of deities.

The concept of God hiding His face has deep roots in Israel's theology. Deuteronomy 31:17-18 warns that covenant disobedience would result in God hiding His face, bringing calamity. Yet lament psalms demonstrate that the righteous also experience God's hiddenness, not as punishment but as mysterious providence. This tension between covenant theology (obedience brings blessing) and lived experience (the righteous suffer) drives much of wisdom literature.

For contemporary readers, Psalm 13 validates the experience of spiritual desolation—times when God seems absent despite continued faith. The psalm demonstrates that honest expression of pain is not incompatible with genuine

faith. Rather, bringing complaints directly to God paradoxically affirms His reality and relevance.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does David's directness in addressing God ('How long wilt thou...') differ from complaining about God to others, and why is this distinction important?
2. What is the difference between feeling forgotten by God and being actually forgotten, and how does this distinction help in seasons of spiritual darkness?
3. How does the repeated 'How long?' capture the way suffering distorts our perception of time, and what does this reveal about human experience?
4. What does it mean for God to 'hide His face,' and how is this experienced differently from intellectual doubt about God's existence?
5. How might this psalm shape our prayer life when we face prolonged difficulty without clear divine intervention?

Interlinear Text

אַנְהָהָ	עַד	נִצְחָה	תִּשְׁאַכְתָּנִי	אַנְהָהָ	עַד	נִצְחָה
H5704	H575	me O LORD	How long wilt thou forget	for ever	H5704	H575
		H3068	H7911	H5331		

מִתְּפִנִּים	פָּנִים יְהִ	אַתָּה	פָּסַת יְרִ	מִתְּפִנִּים	פָּנִים יְהִ	אַתָּה
how long wilt thou hide	thy face			how long wilt thou hide	thy face	
H5641	H853		H4480	H6440		

Additional Cross-References

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

Psalms 89:46 (References Lord): How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?

Lamentations 5:20 (Parallel theme): Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

Psalms 80:4 (References Lord): O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?

Psalms 6:3 (References Lord): My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?

Psalms 35:17 (References Lord): Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.

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

Psalms 10:12 (References Lord): Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble.

Psalms 85:5 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

Psalms 74:1 (Parallel theme): O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?