

Psalms 142:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.

Analysis

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. This verse moves from vocal prayer to specific description of David's circumstances—overwhelming distress internally and hidden dangers externally. Yet even in this desperate situation, David affirms God's intimate knowledge of his situation.

"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me" (עָלִי רוּחִי בְּהִתְעַטֵּף/behit'atef alay ruchi) describes internal state of extreme distress. Ataf means to cover, overwhelm, faint, grow feeble. The Hithpael form (reflexive) intensifies the meaning: my spirit wraps itself in darkness, becomes covered over, faints within me. This describes depression, discouragement, emotional exhaustion, spiritual darkness—the internal experience of crisis when strength fails and hope dims.

David doesn't hide or minimize this overwhelming feeling. Scripture validates honest acknowledgment of internal struggle. Elijah fled and asked to die (1 Kings 19:4). Jonah despaired (Jonah 4:3). Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (Jeremiah 20:14). Jesus experienced agony in Gethsemane where His soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). Honest lament is biblical, not evidence of weak faith.

"Then thou knewest my path" (וְיָדָהּ נֶתִיבָתִי/ve'atah yada'ta netivati) provides the crucial counterpoint. Yada means intimate, experiential knowledge. Netivah

means path, way, life direction. Even when David's spirit was overwhelmed and he couldn't see clearly, God knew his path perfectly. When we're lost in darkness, God sees clearly. When we're disoriented, God knows exactly where we are and where we're going.

"In the way wherein I walked" (בְּאֹרַח־זוֹ אֶהְלֵךְ/be'orach-zu ahalekh) specifies the path David traveled—not theoretical possibilities but the actual road he walked. Orach means path, road, way of life. God's knowledge isn't abstract but specific, practical, detailed.

"Have they privily laid a snare for me" (הֲתָמְנוּ לִי סָנַן/tamnu fachi li) reveals external danger corresponding to internal distress. Taman means to hide, conceal, bury secretly. Pach means snare, trap—like bird-catchers concealing nets to catch unwary birds. David's enemies plotted secretly, hiding traps along his path. He faced not only overwhelming internal distress but also hidden external dangers. Yet God knew about both—internal state and external threats.

Historical Context

The imagery of hidden snares reflects both David's literal experience and spiritual reality. During years fleeing Saul, David constantly faced ambushes, betrayals, and secret plots. The Ziphites betrayed his location to Saul (1 Samuel 23:19). Saul surrounded the mountain where David hid (1 Samuel 23:26). Doeg the Edomite massacred the priests who helped David (1 Samuel 22:18). Shimei cursed him during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 16:5). Plots and conspiracies threatened him constantly.

The snare imagery appears frequently in Psalms and wisdom literature. Proverbs 29:5 warns: "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." Psalm 91:3 promises God "shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." Psalm 124:7 celebrates: "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped." Hidden traps represent both human conspiracies and spiritual deceptions Satan uses against believers.

David's affirmation that God "knewest my path" reflects covenant confidence in

divine omniscience and care. Psalm 139:1-3 declares: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." This isn't oppressive surveillance but comforting care—God knows, understands, and watches over His people.

Jesus faced similar circumstances—overwhelming distress in Gethsemane and hidden plots by religious leaders (Matthew 26:3-4). Yet He trusted the Father's knowledge and plan, praying "not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42). The Father knew Christ's path perfectly, including the cross, and brought resurrection victory.

For believers facing depression, discouragement, or hidden opposition, this verse provides profound comfort. When we're overwhelmed and can't see clearly, when enemies plot secretly against us, God knows perfectly. Nothing catches Him by surprise. He sees both our internal struggles and external threats, and His knowledge leads to His intervention.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does honest acknowledgment of feeling overwhelmed differ from sinful despair or lack of faith?
2. What comfort does it provide that God 'knows your path' even when you feel lost, confused, or disoriented?
3. How do modern believers face 'hidden snares'—whether spiritual deceptions, subtle temptations, or concealed opposition?
4. Why is it important that God knows both internal struggles (overwhelmed spirit) and external threats (hidden snares)?
5. How can remembering God's complete knowledge of your circumstances provide strength during times of overwhelming distress?

Interlinear Text

בְּהִתְעֵט יְיָ	עַל יְיָ	רוּחַ יְיָ	וְאֵתֶּה	יָדָעְתָּ		
was overwhelmed	H5921	When my spirit	H859	within me then thou knewest		
H5848		H7307		H3045		
נִתְּיָבָה תִּי	בְּאַחַח	זוּ	אֶהֱלֵךְ	טָמְנוּ	פֶּחַ	לִי:
my path	In the way	wherein	I walked	have they privily laid	a snare	H0
H5410	H734	H2098	H1980	H2934	H6341	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 140:5 (Parallel theme): The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.

Psalms 143:4 (Spirit): Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.

Psalms 61:2 (Parallel theme): From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Psalms 141:9 (Parallel theme): Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.

Jeremiah 18:22 (Parallel theme): Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.

Psalms 102:4 (Parallel theme): My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

Psalms 22:14 (Parallel theme): I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

Psalms 31:4 (Parallel theme): Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.

Psalms 77:3 (Spirit): I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.

Psalms 1:6 (Parallel theme): For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

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