

Psalms 142:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

Analysis

I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. The "right hand" was the position of the defender or advocate in ancient judicial settings (Psalm 109:31, 110:5). David scans for human help and finds none. The verb *nakar* (נָכַר), "know," means to recognize, acknowledge, or pay regard to—David feels utterly abandoned, not merely alone but actively ignored.

"Refuge failed me" uses *manos* (מָנוֹס), a place of escape or shelter. Every human refuge has collapsed—no safe haven, no protector, no ally. Yet this statement of complete human destitution sets up the psalm's climax: when all earthly refuge fails, God Himself becomes the refuge (v. 5). The hyperbolic "no man cared for my soul" (*nephesh*, נֶפֶשׁ) expresses the depth of isolation—no one values his life or seeks his welfare.

This radical aloneness anticipates Christ's greater abandonment. When arrested, "all the disciples forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56). On the cross, He experienced even the Father's forsaking (Matthew 27:46), bearing the ultimate isolation our sin deserves so we need never be truly alone.

Historical Context

During David's fugitive years, many who might have supported him feared Saul's wrath. Even Jonathan, David's closest friend, couldn't always be present (1 Samuel 20). David's mighty men eventually joined him, but Psalm 142 may reflect an earlier period of complete isolation. The cave provided physical protection but also represented social death—cut off from family, tribal support, and covenant community. This context makes David's confidence in God (v. 5) all the more remarkable.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Have you experienced a season when 'refuge failed' and human help disappeared? How did God prove faithful?
2. How does recognizing that Christ experienced ultimate abandonment comfort you in times of isolation?
3. What is the relationship between acknowledging human limitations and finding sufficiency in God?

Interlinear Text

הִבֵּי יָד	יָמִי יְמִין	וַיֵּרָא	וְאֵין	לִי
I looked	on my right hand	and beheld	H369	H0
H5027	H3225	H7200		
	מִן כִּי יֵרָא	אֶבֶד	מִן אוֹסֵף	מִמֶּנִּי
	but there was no man that would know	failed	me refuge	H4480
	H5234	H6	H4498	H369
דֹּרֵשׁ	לְנַפְשִׁי			
me no man cared	for my soul			
H1875	H5315			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 30:17 (Parallel theme): For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

Psalms 88:18 (Parallel theme): Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Psalms 31:11 (Parallel theme): I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me.

Matthew 26:56 (Parallel theme): But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Psalms 88:8 (Parallel theme): Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

Psalms 69:20 (Parallel theme): Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.

1 Samuel 27:1 (Parallel theme): And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

2 Timothy 4:16 (Parallel theme): At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

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