

Psalms 38:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me.

Analysis

Forsake me not, O LORD (אַל-תַּעֲזָבֵנִי יְהוָה, al-ta'azveni YHWH)—Azav means abandon, forsake. The negative particle al makes this urgent. **O my God, be not far from me** (אֱלֹהַי אַל-תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי, elohai al-tirchak mimmenni)—Rachak means be distant. David uses both divine names to appeal to covenant faithfulness and sovereign power.

Psalm 38 is the third penitential psalm, a raw cry of anguish under divine discipline. David feels sin's weight (vv. 3-8), friend abandonment (v. 11), and enemy pursuit (vv. 12, 19-20). This expresses the sufferer's deepest fear: that God might withdraw. Yet crying out proves God hasn't abandoned him. Jesus echoed this from the cross (Psalm 22:1, 38:21).

Historical Context

Written during illness and social isolation (possibly during Absalom's rebellion), David experiences compounding trauma. Ancient theology often viewed illness as divine punishment, making sickness a spiritual crisis. The early church recited penitential psalms during persecution.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. When have you felt simultaneously guilty before God yet desperate for his presence?
2. How does David's urgent plea model honest prayer rather than stoic resignation?
3. What does it mean that Jesus experienced the forsakenness David feared but you need never experience?

Interlinear Text

אֶל	תַּעֲזֹב נִי	יְהוָה	אֵל לִי	אֶל	תִּרְחֹק ק	מִמֶּנִּי:
H408	Forsake	me not O LORD	O my God	H408	be not far	H4480
	H5800	H3068	H430		H7368	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:19 (References Lord): But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me.

Psalms 22:24 (Parallel theme): For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

Psalms 22:11 (Parallel theme): Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.