

# Psalms 44:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.

## Analysis

**Divine Omniscience and Heart-Searching:** This verse appears within a communal lament where Israel protests that their suffering isn't due to covenant unfaithfulness (Psalm 44:17-22). The rhetorical question "halo Elohim yachkor-zot" (הלא אֱלֹהִים יַחְקֹר־זֹאת) means "Would not God search this out?" or "Shall not God investigate this?" The verb "chakhar" (חָקַר) means to search, examine thoroughly, investigate deeply—the same word used in Jeremiah 17:10 ("I the LORD search the heart") and Psalm 139:1 ("O LORD, thou hast searched me").

**The Knowledge of Hidden Things:** The second clause provides the reason God would discover any secret idolatry: "ki-hu yodea ta'alumot lev" (כִּי־הוּא יֹדֵעַ תַּעֲלָמוֹת לֵב), "for He knows the secrets of the heart." The noun "ta'alumot" (תַּעֲלָמוֹת) comes from the root עָלַם (alam), meaning "to hide" or "to conceal," thus "hidden things, secrets, mysteries." The heart (לֵב, lev) in Hebrew thought represents not just emotions but the center of thought, will, and moral decision-making. God's knowledge penetrates beyond external actions to internal motives, thoughts, and secret intentions.

**Theological and Rhetorical Function:** The psalmist uses this verse to claim innocence—if they had secretly worshiped other gods or harbored hidden idolatry, God would know and would be justified in punishing them. But since God knows they haven't been unfaithful (verse 17, "our heart is not turned back"), their current suffering must have another explanation. This raises the profound theological problem addressed throughout the psalm: Why do covenant-faithful

people suffer? Verse 22 provides the answer: "for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter"—suffering comes not from sin but from faithful witness. Paul quotes verse 22 in Romans 8:36 to describe Christian suffering for Christ, showing this psalm prefigures the suffering of God's people throughout redemptive history.

## Historical Context

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Psalms 44 is classified as a communal lament, though its specific historical setting is debated. The superscription attributes it to "the sons of Korah," a Levitical guild of temple singers. Some scholars connect it to the Babylonian exile (586-538 BC), the Maccabean period (167-160 BC when Antiochus IV Epiphanes persecuted faithful Jews), or earlier crises during the divided monarchy. The psalm's themes—military defeat (verses 9-16), national humiliation, yet maintained covenant faithfulness (verses 17-22)—fit multiple periods of Israel's history.

The concept of God's omniscience, particularly His knowledge of the heart, pervades Old Testament theology. Solomon prayed at the temple's dedication, "thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men" (2 Chronicles 6:30). This attribute distinguishes YHWH from pagan gods—He isn't fooled by external ritual or deceptive appearance (1 Samuel 16:7, "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"). The prophets used this truth to condemn hypocritical worship (Isaiah 29:13, "this people draw near me with their mouth... but have removed their heart far from me").

The psalmist's protest of innocence parallels Job's self-defense against his friends' accusations. Both affirm that suffering doesn't always indicate divine punishment for sin. This challenges the retribution theology that dominated Ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition. The psalm's conclusion (verse 22, quoted by Paul) reveals a crucial truth: God's people suffer not despite faithfulness but because of it. Martyrdom becomes witness (*martyria* in Greek means both). Early Christians, facing Roman persecution, found comfort in this psalm—their suffering wasn't evidence of God's abandonment but participation in Christ's sufferings (Colossians 1:24, 1 Peter 4:12-16). Augustine later used this verse to refute Donatists who

claimed Christians who suffered persecution must have sinned, arguing that God permits the righteous to suffer for His purposes.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How does the truth of God's omniscience—that He knows even the secrets of the heart—both comfort the innocent and warn the guilty?
2. What does this psalm teach about the relationship between covenant faithfulness and suffering, challenging the assumption that obedience always brings prosperity?
3. How should believers respond when they experience suffering despite maintaining faithfulness to God?
4. In what ways does this verse connect to New Testament teaching about suffering for Christ's sake (Romans 8:36, 2 Timothy 3:12)?
5. How does God's knowledge of our hidden motives and thoughts influence how we approach worship, confession, and self-examination?

## Interlinear Text

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הֵלֵא	אֵלֵהִים	יִחְקֹר	זֶאת	כִּי	הוּא	יֵדַע
H3808	Shall not God	search this out	H2063	H3588	H1931	for he knoweth
	H430	H2713				H3045
תַּעֲלֹמֹת	לֵב:					
the secrets	of the heart					
H8587	H3820					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 17:10** (Parallel theme): I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

**Jeremiah 23:24** (Parallel theme): Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

**Job 31:4** (Parallel theme): Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** (References God): For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

**1 Corinthians 4:5** (References God): Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

**Romans 2:16** (References God): In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

**Revelation 2:23** (Parallel theme): And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

**Job 31:14** (References God): What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?