

Psalms 88:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?

Analysis

LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?

This verse asks the psalm's central question directly: Why has God abandoned me? These two parallel questions represent faith's honest struggle with divine hiddenness—the experience of God's felt absence despite theological knowledge of His omnipresence. This is among Scripture's most poignant expressions of feeling forsaken by God.

"LORD, why castest thou off my soul?" (לָמָּה תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי/Yahweh lamah tiznach nafshi) addresses God by His covenant name while questioning His covenant faithfulness. Lamah (why?) demands explanation, reason, purpose. Zanach (to cast off, reject, forsake, spurn) is strong language suggesting complete abandonment and rejection. Nefesh (soul, life, person) indicates the totality of the psalmist's being feels rejected by God.

This echoes other psalms of abandonment: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1, quoted by Jesus on the cross), and "Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1). The tradition of lament psalm allows direct questioning of God—not in rebellion but in covenant relationship that permits honest struggle. To ask "why?" assumes God has reasons, cares about our suffering, and can be addressed directly.

"Why hidest thou thy face from me?" (תַּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי/tastir panekha mimmenni) uses the metaphor of God's face representing His favorable presence and blessing.

Throughout Scripture, God's shining face means blessing (Numbers 6:25: "The LORD make his face shine upon thee"), while hidden face means judgment or abandonment (Deuteronomy 31:17: "I will hide my face from them"). Satar (to hide, conceal) suggests deliberate action—God actively hides His face rather than simply being absent.

These two questions—cast off my soul, hide Your face—express the same reality from two angles: rejection and absence. To be cast off is to be expelled from relationship; to have God's face hidden is to lose His favorable presence. Together they describe complete sense of divine abandonment—the dark night of the soul where God seems not just distant but actively against the sufferer.

Theologically, this verse validates the experience of God's felt absence without denying His actual omnipresence. God can be everywhere present yet hide His face—withdraw the experience of His presence while remaining ontologically present. This distinction helps suffering believers understand that feeling abandoned doesn't mean being abandoned, yet validates that the feeling itself is real and agonizing.

Historical Context

Throughout Israel's history, collective and individual experiences of divine hiddenness shaped faith. The exile seemed like God casting off Israel (Lamentations 5:20-22). Prophets spoke of God hiding His face due to sin (Isaiah 59:2). Yet God promised never to ultimately forsake His people (Isaiah 54:7-8: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee").

The question 'why?' runs through Scripture's wrestling with suffering. Job repeatedly demands God explain His actions. Habakkuk questions why God allows wicked to triumph. Jeremiah accuses God of being 'as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night' (Jeremiah 14:8). This questioning tradition distinguishes biblical faith from stoic acceptance or fatalistic resignation. The covenant relationship permits—even demands—honest engagement with God

about suffering's meaning.

Jesus's cry of dereliction on the cross—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)—quotes Psalm 22:1 and echoes Psalm 88:14. The sinless Son experienced ultimate divine abandonment, bearing God's wrath against sin. Early church fathers debated how Christ could be forsaken by the Father while remaining united in the Trinity. The mystery remains: Christ experienced real God-forsakenness so that believers never will be ultimately forsaken (Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee").

Church mystics and theologians developed theology of divine hiddenness. John of the Cross described passive nights of the spirit when God withdraws felt presence to purify faith from dependence on feelings. Teresa of Avila taught about spiritual dryness where prayer feels dead. Luther wrote about *Deus absconditus* (hidden God) versus *Deus revelatus* (revealed God). These traditions help believers understand that seasons of God's hiddenness are normal spiritual experience, not signs of lost salvation or weak faith.

Modern believers facing depression, chronic pain, unanswered prayer, or traumatic suffering often feel God has cast them off and hidden His face. Psalm 88 validates this experience while modeling continued prayer even in the absence. The psalm's inclusion in Scripture assures sufferers that feeling forsaken doesn't mean being forsaken, and that honest questions to God are acceptable.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between God's ontological presence (He is always everywhere) and His felt presence (we experience His nearness), and why does God sometimes hide His face?

2. How does Jesus's experience of being forsaken by the Father on the cross change our understanding of our experiences of feeling cast off by God?
3. What role does honest questioning ('why?') play in maintaining relationship with God during suffering, and how is this different from rebellious accusation?

Interlinear Text

מִמְנִי:	כָּפַן יְיָ	תִּסְתֶּה יְיָ	נַפְשִׁי	תִּזְנֶה	! הָאֵל	לָמָּה
H4480	H6440	H5641	H5315	H2186	H3068	H4100
	thou thy face	why hidest	my soul	why castest thou off	LORD	

Additional Cross-References

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

Psalms 13:1 (References Lord): How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

Psalms 43:2 (Parallel theme): For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

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