

PSALMS

Chapter 142

You Are My Refuge

A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.

With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. 3 When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. 4 Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. 5 I cry to you, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” 6 Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! 7 Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

Ps 142 A plaintive prayer for deliverance from powerful enemies—when powerless, alone and without refuge. Apart from the introduction (vv. 1–2) and conclusion (v. 7b), the prayer (in Hebrew) is composed of two four-line stanzas (vv. 3–7a). (CSB)

When David was pursued by King Saul, he hid in a cave, both in Adullam (1Sm 22:1–2) and at Engedi (1Sm 24). A sense of imprisonment, of being buried, of being in the depths—both literally and emotionally—provoked fervent and honest prayer. Since his persecutors were too strong for him, David could only depend on God, who indeed did deliver and exalt him.

Format: Vv 1–2, David’s cry to the Lord; vv 3–4, there is no refuge; vv 5–7, the Lord is the refuge. (TLSB)

The 142nd psalm is a psalm of prayer,, as of one imprisoned under the false teachers who forcefully push them away from the true faith and life. For among the people of Israel it was a constant, commonplace occurrence that the true prophets were persecuted and condemned on account of true worship and the Word of God. all their histories show this, and Christ and St. Stephen also bear witness to it (Matthew 5:12; 23:34; Acts 7:52). Therefore, it is no wonder that so many psalms were written against the false prophets and teachers because it so commonly happened. It has happened to the Church also since the beginning and always happens, so that one may well indeed pray to God that he would deliver us from false teachers and from error. The history of the time of Elijah, King Ahab, and Jezebel serves as an example for these psalms, that all prophet must hide themselves, crawl away. Also in the time of Arius all orthodox bishops had to flee into exile. For the devil will not tolerate God’s Word and his servants. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

Although this psalm was written for a specific trial in David’s life, it speaks in such general terms that it would be appropriate in almost any persecution a Christian might suffer. (PBC)

The psalm begins and ends with appeals to the Lord for help and with expression of confidence that such help will be provided. (PBC)

142:1–2 Initial appeal—using the formal third person (as was often done when addressing kings), equivalent to: “I cry aloud to you, O LORD.” (CSB)

142:1 *with my voice* – It means that he is crying aloud for God to help him. Crying out loud gives relief to pent up feelings and expresses the intensity of the distress. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

142:3–4 Description of his “desperate need” (v. 6). (CSB)

142:3 *When my spirit faints within me.* Because he is overwhelmed by his situation (see 22:14–15). (CSB)

David is utterly exhausted, worn down to his lowest point. (TLSB)

This verse is a beautiful prayer for times of confusion and uncertainty. When we are weary and confused, God knows our way. He understands our problems and knows what will be best for us. This verse reminds us of the more complete description of God’s knowledge and presence in Psalm 139. (PBC)

you know. And are concerned about (cf. v. 4). (CSB)

they have hidden a trap for me – His persecutors. (TLSB)

142:4 *to the right.* To my right hand, where one’s helper or defender stands. (CSB)

takes notice. In Hebrew a less common synonym of “know” (v. 3); see Ru 2:10, 19 (“notice”). (CSB)

David is concerned about two groups of people. One group is his enemies, the adherents of Saul who are determined to destroy him. He sees little prospect for peace and reconciliation with them. A defeat of their plans against him is the only solution. The second group is the indifferent fence-straddlers who want to sit the conflict out and not get involved. (PBC)

142:5–7 Prayer for rescue. (CSB)

142:5 *portion.* The sustainer and preserver of his life. (CSB)

Here, the earthly inheritance is spiritualized to encompass “the land of the living”—i.e., life itself—in which God is our true inheritance. (TLSB)

142:6 *I am brought low* – David’s enemies—such as Saul and his forces, from whom he is hiding in the cave—have the upper hand; he cannot save himself with his own strength. (TLSB)

Not only was he crying out loud, he apparently was shouting, judging from the meaning of this verb. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

142:7 *prison.* Metaphor for the sense of being fettered by affliction. (CSB)

Most likely the cave to which David has fled. Some think this could apply to an actual prison, where David is confined unjustly. Or, by extension, it could be a symbol of inescapable trouble. (TLSB)

that I may give thanks. In celebration of God's saving help. (CSB)

righteous – David is not completely alone, as it had seemed. Rather, he is part of a community of faith who await his deliverance. (TLSB)

will surround me. He will no longer be alone. The conclusion expresses an expectant word of confidence. (CSB)

God's actions on David's behalf will lead the righteous among the uncommitted to recognize David as the king chosen by the Lord. They will then support David's rise to the kingship as a fulfillment of God's will. Saul's son Jonathan was an outstanding example of those who recognize David as the king chosen by God, because of God's blessing upon David. Throughout David's flight from Saul a growing number of supporters, who eventually formed the nucleus of David's government, joined him in exile. Thus the goodness of the Lord not only saved David from Saul, but also began to build a loyal group of supporters for him. (PBC)

Ps 142 David prays to the Lord, pouring out his complaints and troubles. God restores him to the fellowship of faith. We often find ourselves in a "prison" of our own making. Our sins isolate us from others. We are shut out of the community of the righteous. These words of David are even more true of David's Son, Jesus Christ. He, more than anyone, was persecuted, deserted, imprisoned, and tormented. At His burial, He was imprisoned in a cave. But His Father raised Him from the dead to live in the company of those made righteous through His blood. • Heavenly Father, when I have no one to turn to, help me realize that I can turn to You. Be my defender, my refuge, my portion in Christ. Bring me out of my prison and into the company of Your Church, now on earth and in eternity. Amen. (TLSB)