

PSALMS

Chapter 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, ⁴ lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,” lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Ps 13 A cry to the Lord for deliverance from a serious illness that threatens death (see v. 3), which would give David’s enemies just what they wanted. (CSB)

Best understood as having been written while David was being pursued by King Saul. On numerous occasions, David was nearly killed. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, waiting on the Lord; vv 3–4, prayer for an answer; vv 5–6, the Lord’s bountiful love and salvation. (TLSB)

13 title *For the director of music.* Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself. (CSB)

13:1–2 An anguished complaint concerning a prolonged serious illness. (CSB)

13:1 *How long ... ?* – Such language of impatience and complaint is found frequently in the prayers of the Psalter (usually “how long?” or “when?” or “why?”). It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

Even God’s saints sometimes grow impatient under suffering. They earnestly beseech God to deliver them. (PBC)

The sentence is incomplete; it is broken off before finishing the idea of how long until God delivers him. Breaking off a sentence is a way of expressing extreme emotions. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

forget. Ignore. (CSB)

It seemed to the psalmist that God had completely forgotten him. The verb “forget” has more to do with not answering the prayer than a loss of mental recollection. When God remembers someone, it means that he acts on their behalf in accord with what he remembers; when God forgets someone, it means that he does not come to their aid. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Forever – Here it is used in the sense of continually or utterly. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

hide your face. For use in combination with “forget.” In moments of need the psalmists frequently ask God why he hides his face or they plead with him not to do so. When he does hide his face, those who depend on him can only despair. When his face shines on a person, blessing and deliverance come. (CSB)

Psalmist expresses dismay and frustration that God seems indifferent to his suffering. David’s feeling of abandonment is not the result of a sin he has committed (as in Ps 51). Rather, he fears that his enemies will succeed in their plan to kill him. (TLSB)

Hiding the face is a figure to signify the withholding of favor as opposed to Ps. 31:116 and especially Num. 6:25 where God’s face shining on people signifies that he is gracious to them. God has not only “forgotten” him, but he also has withheld favor from him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:2 *how long* – This expresses the psalmist’s personal frustration and grief. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow – Describes pain in the soul, which fits well with the next poetic line. (TLSB)

The counsel or planning he is doing within himself refers to ideas he has had to get out of the difficulty, but since he is still crying out to the Lord, his plans have been unsuccessful. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

heart. In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life” (CSB)

The description is not one of physical pain, but emotional and spiritual – he was filled with a sadness that almost immobilized him. This was daily; there was no letup. Plan after plan failed and gave way to more grief. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:3–4 Appeal for deliverance from death. (CSB)

We now come to the petition section of the psalm. While these verses record the psalmist’s appeal to God, they are exemplary and instructive for all believers in life-threatening situations. What is most instructive here, though, is that the petition includes motivation for God to act, reasons why the prayer should be answered. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:3 *consider* – This is an imperative which means “to gaze intently” at or into something. It is a bold figure here calling for God to look closely at his dilemma. God does not have to look closely at the problem; he knows it all. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

O Lord my God – This urgent request was addressed directly to “Yahweh, my God.” “Yahweh” is the personal and covenant name of God; so David was appealing to God on the basis of his relationship to him by covenant, using his personal name. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Give light to my eyes. – In the vivid language of the OT the eyes are dimmed by failing strength. (CSB)

Here the word means to revive the physical strength and moral energy (see also Prov. 29:13; Ezek. 9:8). The situation here is much like that recorded in the story of Jonathan, who was failing quickly in his vitality unto he ate and his eyes were enlightened (1 Sam. 14:27-29). How would God light up his eyes? By causing his favor to shine upon him meaning to show him favor and answer his prayer. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

I will sleep the sleep of death – David is afraid to rest his eyes. King Saul tried long and hard to kill the youthful David as recorded in 1Sm. (TLSB)

The psalmist represents himself as a dying man, as one already half-gone, who soon will be wholly overwhelmed with the darkness of death, if the Lord does not give him new power of life. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:4 Make sure God’s cause is our own. Joshua learned that lesson in Joshua 5:13-14. (CSB)

Prevailed – The enemy would say, “I have prevailed over him.” In other words, he would claim the victory once and for all (the verb is a present perfect). If his enemy prevailed over him, then also those who were on his enemies side oppressing him (those who harass me, would rejoice when he was over thrown. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

If David’s enemies succeed in their plan to kill him, people might think that God Himself is against him. David seems esp. disturbed that his death would be taken as a sign of God’s judgment. (TLSB)

Shaken – Referring to death (as in 18:38; 82:7; 106:26; Jdg 5:27; 2Sa 1:19; Job 18:12). (CSB)

Their joy would almost be a cultic cry and the occasion for their rejoicing would be the removal (the verb means “be shaken, moved, removed, overthrow” from his place; s.v. Ps. 62:2). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:5–6 Concluding expression of confidence – A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard. Here David’s confidence becomes a testimony to God’s people. (CSB)

13:5 *I have trusted* – I have trusted and continue to trust; (s.v. Ps. 4:5), emphasizing that he has a faith that is holding fast to God for security. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

unfailing love. The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel as well as to David and his dynasty. He doesn’t know when help will come but that it will and he will rejoice. (CSB)

heart. In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life.” (CSB)

rejoices. It is David who will rejoice, not his enemies. (CSB)

Not only shall gladness fill his very heart, but his praise will become vocal at that time. (Leupold)

David will rejoice in God's deliverance due to the fact that he trusts in God's loyal love. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

13:6 A vow to praise. Many prayers in the Psalter include such vows in anticipation of the expected answer to prayer. They reflect Israel's religious consciousness that praise must follow deliverance as surely as prayer springs from need—if God is to be truly honored. Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God's saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple. (CSB)

God sets right what is wrong in our lives. Thus, after the Lord deals “bountifully” with the psalmist in 116:7, his soul is once again allowed to come to rest (cf Mt 11:28–30). (TLSB)

He remembered God's past goodness. These memories renewed his confidence that God's promises would stand. The cries of David and of all God's saints for deliverance are motivated, not only by self-interest, but also by love for truth and for God's honor. (PBC)

Ps 13 In moments of fear and frustration, our prayers can easily slip into blaming God for our problems. Asking “How long, O LORD?” (v 1) is okay. Casting blame on the Lord and reproving His failure to act according to our wishes and timetables, however, comes close to blasphemy. When our prayers question God and His ways, we do well to remember that Jesus not only commanded us to pray but also graciously promised to hear our prayers and intercede for us before the Father. No matter how weak our prayers or deep our frustration, Jesus' grace makes up for their shortcomings. • Lord Jesus, You conquered death and the grave and, therefore, can handle anything, including our impatient or even disrespectful prayers. Teach us to know that you are greater than all things, so that we pray confidently, Thy will be done. Amen. (TLSB)