

Psalm 13 – Bible Study Notes Finding God in the Valley of Despair

Background context: David is the most cited author of this psalm, though no certainty exists. Accepting Davidic authorship, it may have been written during his time in exile while being pursued by Saul and his army.

Outline Structure:

- I. Living in the valley of despair (vv. 1-2)
 - A. Feeling as if God has abandoned you (v. 1)
 - B. Feeling as if the world has abandoned you (v. 2)
- II. Seeking help in the valley of despair (vv. 3-4)
 - A. Belief that without God he will be destroyed (v. 3)
 - B. A cry out for God's help (v. 4)
- III. Praising God in the valley of despair (vv. 5-6)
 - A. The psalmist trusts God (v. 5)
 - B. The psalmist praises God (v. 6)

Living in the valley of despair (vv. 1-2)

Verse 1 – Psalmist feels God is against him.

This is not temporary sadness, but despair.

4 of the first 5 lines begin with “how long.”

This shows both the focus of the lines and the strength of the emotion.

Believes God has forgotten him.

Believes God has turned against him.

Verse 2 – Psalmist feels abandoned by the world.

He feels like he can trust only himself.

Believes the evil people of the world succeed while he fails.

Life Question

Describe a time when you felt like the world is out to get you; when you felt like God has abandoned you; when it seemed like the whole world prospered while you failed.

Seeking help in the valley of despair (vv. 3-4)

Verse 3 – The psalmist believes that without God's help he will be destroyed.

Verse 4 – The psalmist calls out to God for help.

He seeks the same God he thinks abandoned him.

He knows God is a refuge and shelter.

Life Question

To whom do you turn when you feel discouraged or depressed?

Praising God in the valley of despair (vv. 5-6)

Verse 5 – He trusts God for his...

... Loyalty (חֶסֶד)*

... Salvation (יְשׁוּעָה)

**Note:* This Hebrew word (*hesed*), often translated “lovingkindness,” denotes more of a “covenant loyalty.” The connotation is that man has abandoned the Mosaic covenant by rebelling against God, but God will remain loyal to His people and His covenant. This emphasizes God’s love and righteousness, showing that He is a God who is trustworthy even when man is not trustworthy.¹

Verse 6 – He praises God despite his situation or feelings.

Life Question

What do you say to God when you are in despair?
How can you praise Him during those times?

¹ *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. CD-ROM Edition. © 1994-2000 Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.