

## A. Psalm 13 – Sonship and Personal Lamentation

The topic of lamentation is perhaps the best place to begin in considering psalms that express Israel's challenges in its sonship. For, not only is lament a predominant theme in the Psalter, it speaks very powerfully to the struggle of faith and perseverance that confronts every child of God at various times in his or her life. Lament can reflect the heartbreak and pain of personal failure in one's walk with God, but also the grief of unjust suffering and the fear and anxiousness that come when one senses that God has turned away and forsaken him. Two things, then, are foundationally important in considering lamentation and its place in Israel's songs of sonship.

- 1) The first is that lament, understood biblically, is more than feeling sad about one's circumstances; it is crying out to God in the midst of those circumstances. It might involve pleas for deliverance, but goes beyond mere self-concern and the desire to have one's circumstance improve. Lament is grounded in honest and humble acknowledgment of one's plight and helplessness in it, and the desperate need for God's intervention and provision. In its scriptural use in relation to Israel, lament has a *covenant* orientation, and therefore a *relational* one. That is, Israel's laments (individual and corporate) reflected the people's covenant sonship and what that required of them and their covenant Father. Thus Israel's scriptural lamentations aren't so much about finding oneself in a trying circumstance and calling upon God in the belief that He can remedy it; rather, they arise from failures and trials under the covenant relationship and express the lamenters' hope and faith in God's integrity and faithfulness to His relationship with them.
- 2) Lamentation is grounded in covenant relationship and the truths it entails, and so gives voice to faith and hope. Thus lament is a crucial aspect of authentic *worship* – the worship that God seeks and that honors and pleases Him. This might not appear obvious at first glance, and some might even disagree, especially when lament is associated with complaint. But simply the fact that lamentation is a central dimension of the Psalter shows that, rightly understood and employed, it is absolutely a fundamental part of the children's worship of their covenant Father.

There are a multitude of lament psalms in the Psalter. Lamentation, both personal and communal, is the primary focus of dozens of psalms, and it is a notable feature of dozens more. Indeed, lament in some form and to some degree is present in virtually all of Israel's psalms, even those whose emphasis lies elsewhere (ref. Psalms 11, 14, 19, 30, 33, 46, 52, 63, etc.). And so any number of psalms could be examined as examples of lamentation, but Psalm 13 is a good choice because it is concise and contains the essential components of scriptural lament, including sorrow, complaint, supplication, faith, hope, and patience.

1. Psalm 13 is ascribed to David, and is one of his many psalms that express his lament. The particular circumstance it speaks to is unknown, and scholars have offered various possibilities. What is clear is that David's life – for all its glory and the profound blessing of his unique relationship with Yahweh – was filled with hardship. In fact, trouble, opposition and suffering were his constant companions from the time Samuel anointed him as Yahweh's chosen shepherd. Whether king Saul, outside and internal adversaries, and even his own personal failures, David knew adversity and suffering all too well, and he knew what it was to feel forsaken and in desperate need of Yahweh's care.

2. Though not catalogued with the *Songs of Ascent*, this psalm very much follows an ascending pattern in its structure and movement. This sort of pattern is actually characteristic of lament psalms, as they, too, are songs of *sonship*. That is, they express the psalmist's crisis, affliction and pleas for help, but as a child within Yahweh's covenant household, and therefore a son confident that his cries and supplication will be heard and answered by his faithful and loving covenant Father.

So it is with this psalm: It opens with David crying out to Yahweh in his sense of abandonment. In the face of great opposition and his enemies' apparent triumph over him, David felt forsaken by his God; it seemed to him that Yahweh had forgotten him; far worse, David was tormented by the thought that He had intentionally turned away ("hidden his face") from him. David felt utterly alone, left to bear the burden and anxious thoughts of his own pain and the sorrow that filled his vexed and weary heart (13:1-2).

3. David was concerned that Yahweh had turned away from him, but he knew that such rejection, even if it were true, would not be the Lord's final word to him. For David recognized that, like every Israelite, he was bound to his God as a son to a Father; indeed, Yahweh had chosen him uniquely and anointed him to shepherd His people on His behalf. In the heat and agony of his suffering, David *felt* that the Lord had abandoned and forgotten him, and yet he *knew* his God and his own relationship with Him, and so remained confident that Yahweh would hear his pleas and come to his aid (13:3).

David's enemies had beaten him down and were celebrating their apparent triumph over him, most especially their seeming victory over his *mind*. He felt utterly defeated, and yet clung to the truth of his sonship and calling, even in the darkness of his despair. Thus he pled with Yahweh to again "enlighten his eyes" to the truth, and thus strip his enemies of their triumph and boasting (13:4). *For their victory didn't consist in the physical and emotional harm they inflicted, but their ability to crush David's faith and dissolve his confidence of God's faithfulness to him and His purposes for him.*

4. Thus David ended on the high note of assured faith: "*For I, indeed, have trusted in Your lovingkindness.*" This Hebrew noun often rendered "lovingkindness" is a covenantal term that refers to Yahweh's kindness and loving favor that flow from His faithfulness to His covenant commitments. By declaring his trust in the Lord's lovingkindness, David was affirming his confidence that He remains faithfully devoted to His covenant and its goals. David was convinced that Yahweh would arise on his behalf because he knew Him to be jealous for His own ends, which He has revealed and ratified by covenant charter; *David's assurance was grounded in God's integrity and faithfulness, not some whimsical sense that He is loving, kind and merciful.* It was Yahweh's steadfast veracity that lifted David's heart from the dust and reinvigorated it with sure hope that he would again see His hand of deliverance, just as he had done so many times before (13:5).

Hence David's exultant song of praise (13:6). Though the pressure and agony of his affliction had made it appear that God had forsaken him, David needed only to set his mind again on the truth to be delivered from his deception and despair. Yahweh had indeed "dealt bountifully" with him, and His disposition and its provision hadn't changed. If he would trust and wait, he would surely see the Lord's hand on his behalf.