

# Complaining like a Christian

## Psalm 13

As God's book of inspired prayer and praise, the Psalms show us how to express ourselves obediently to God. Their content is often not at all what we expect, and we should let their candor, content, tone and timbre shape our devotional and liturgical lives (e.g. 78:65, 69:22-26, 87:1-3). Luther said the Psalms are the Bible in miniature, and if we are to be always reforming and growing in Christ we must be growing in our understanding of them. This includes the Psalms of Lament which make up the largest genre in the Psalter, about a third. Psalm 13 is a preeminent example.

### **How Long, Yahweh? (vv1-2)**

Refusing to complain and argue with God is trying to be holier or making him smaller than he is. Hyper-Calvinists believe that because God ordains everything that comes to pass, it makes no difference what we do—so why get all worked up in life or in prayer? You might as well say that because an author is writing the story, it makes no difference how the characters act. As much as we might distance ourselves from Hyper-Calvinism, a good test is to see whether anything like Psalm 13 ever comes out of our mouths and if it gets stuck on the way out. On the other side, many Christians deny that God has anything to do with disasters, some of which even insurance companies admit are "Acts of God." Despite good motivation to protect him, if God isn't sovereign, then figure out the guy in charge and go to him. David knows Yahweh is personally involved and in control, but he still cries out according to how he feels—forgotten by God (v1). His concern is not slipping out of God's mind, but being abandoned in the current circumstances. He knows Yahweh is a deliverer, but this is not the same as being delivered. Without making bitter accusation, David implores God and looks to the future: will this go on forever? He is exhausted from making plans, churning in sorrow, and seeing his enemies exalted (v2).

### **Consider and Answer (vv3-4)**

In these complaints and the pleading to follow, we see David's steadfast faith in his cry "my God" (v3). To the Hebraic mind, light for the eyes is like the breath of life (Prov. 29:13, 1 Sam. 14:27), and sleep is a metaphor for death (v3). David gives three reasons why God should answer him: lest he die, his enemies declare victory, and his foes rejoice over him (v4). These are good reasons, aligned with God's purposes. Verses 1-4 contain four complaints and three pleas for a perfect seven. David's complaint is complete and finished, but he is not.

### **I Have Trusted (vv5-6)**

We ought to take it at face value that this Psalm was composed at a single sitting. This means that the trial is *still* going on as David finishes it by declaring his unwavering trust, joy and loyalty to God. This is exactly what we need to do when we are overwhelmed in a situation, when the crucible of affliction tries us. Jesus not was

perfected in early retirement or on vacation. He was perfected through suffering (Heb. 2:10). David trusts and *proclaims* his trust in God in the midst of his trouble when it matters most (v5). Regardless of what happens, he rejoices in God's salvation and will sing, even though probably doesn't feel like it (v6). This must be the consistent experience of every Christian who would see the Gospel go forward and grow in grace, sorrowful but always rejoicing (1 Cor. 6:2-10). We know that the story of the world is a comedy, but everywhere we look are seeming tragedies, little eucatastrophes, that God want us to take part in, and to take part in himself with us. This means engaging, complaining, and trusting.

*Jerry Owen – August 16, 2009*