



## Psalm 142 - Prayer for Deliverance from Persecutors

A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer.

### Introduction

This individual lament, with its title that refers to David being in the cave, is a companion to Psalm 57. It is also similar to Psalms 140-141, the faithful person praying for protection from persecutors. Unlike the previous two psalms, this one has no prayers for the enemies' downfall and thus is like Psalm 143.

The cave was probably Adullam cave, mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:1, although the caves of En Gedi in 1 Samuel 24:1 are also a possibility. Adullam seems to be the best fit; therefore it can be said that Psalms 34 and 57 are also associated with this period of David's life.

Although elsewhere the Hebrew word *Maskil* is translated as prayer, hymn or contemplation, according to James Montgomery Boice it should be instruction.

### Psalm 142:1-2 - I Pour out My Complaint before the Lord.

The words here express earnest prayer in the face of imminent danger: cry out, make supplication, pour out my complaint, and tell my trouble. Each of these acts is directed towards the Lord, upon whom the worshipper depends.

- <sup>1</sup> With my voice I cry to the Lord;  
with my voice I make supplication to the Lord.

### Psalm 142:1

With my voice I cry to the Lord. This was more than David's appeal for help. It was also his declaration of allegiance to Yahweh, the God of Israel. David well knew the pagan gods worshipped by the surrounding Gentiles, but determined that

he would never cry out to them - only to the Lord. Alexander Maclaren commented, "Trouble and lack of human sympathy or help have done their best work on him, since they have driven him to God's breast. He has cried in vain to man; and now he has gathered himself up in a firm resolve to cast himself upon God." Charles Spurgeon added, "Caves make good closets for prayer; their gloom and solitude are helpful to the exercise of devotion. Had David prayed as much in his palace as he did in his cave, he might never have fallen into the act which brought such misery upon his later days."

**David's son Solomon would later make a plea to the Lord for him to hear and answer such cries from all his people: <<Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant, and to the plea of your people Israel, listening to them whenever they call to you>> (1 Kings 8:52).**

With my voice I make supplication to the Lord. As a man of deep spiritual experience, David knew that there were many ways to cry out to the Lord - in thought, in feeling, in action. Here David cried out to God with his voice, knowing that silent feelings were not enough for his present need. Derek Kidner observed, "David, like Bartimæus in the Gospels, knows the value of refusing to relapse into silence. That way lies despair."

<sup>2</sup> I pour out my complaint before him;  
I tell my trouble before him.

### Psalm 142:2

I pour out my complaint before him. David had a complaint to bring before God. As Psalm 142 develops, David asks God's help in the face of enemies who hoped to trap him, so this complaint is likely against his enemies: <<**Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from the dread enemy**>> (Psalm 64:1). Whatever the source, David did the right thing with his complaint; he brought it before the Lord. Kidner remarked, "My complaint is not as petulant a word as in English, but might be rendered 'my troubled thoughts'." Maclaren added, "The outpouring of complaint is not meant to tell Jehovah what he does not know. It is for the complainer's relief, not for God's information."

I tell my trouble before him. David had the heart later expressed by the apostle Paul: <<**Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God**>> (Philippians 4:6). Spurgeon noted, "It is not merely words that you have to utter, you have to lay all your trouble before God. As a child tells its mother its griefs, tell the Lord all your griefs, your complaints, your miseries, your fears. Tell them all out, and great relief will come to your spirit."

### Psalm 142:3-4 - I Have None to Trust but You.

These verses express what people often feel in the kind of situation for which this psalm is geared: physical exhaustion, beset by dangers and confused, and painfully alone and isolated. There is the reminder <<*you know my way*>> (v.3), which the next section will develop.

- <sup>3</sup> When my spirit is faint,  
you know my way.  
In the path where I walk  
they have hidden a trap for me.
- <sup>4</sup> Look on my right hand and see —  
there is no one who takes notice of me;  
no refuge remains to me;  
no one cares for me.

### Psalm 142:3-4

When my spirit is faint. David knew the trial of physical weakness and pain. In the midst of this kind of chastisement, he cries out to God for mercy: <<*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror*>> (Psalm 6:2). Jeremiah was another man who felt as David did in his times of trouble: <<*My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick*>> (Jeremiah 8:18), and: <<*Let all their evildoing come before you; and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many and my heart is faint*>> (Lamentations 1:22).

You know my way. Anytime David felt overwhelmed, he found confidence in knowing that God knew his journey and his walk. God knows each person's path and their walk in all of its good and all of its errors. Spurgeon commented, "David was a hero, and yet his spirit sank: he could smite a giant down, but he could not keep himself up. He did not know his own path, nor feel able to bear his own burden."

In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. David did not know where the snares were, but he knew they were out there. David also knew that as he depended upon him, God could preserve him from secret snares. Spurgeon remarked, "The use of concealed traps is disgraceful to our enemies, but they care little to what tricks they resort for their evil purposes. Wicked men must find some exercise for their malice, and therefore when they dare not openly assail they will privately ensnare."

Look on my right hand and see. Maclaren commented, “The ‘right hand’ is the place for a champion or helper, but this lonely sufferer’s is unguarded, and there is none who knows him, in the sense of recognising him as one to be helped.”

There is no one who takes notice of me; no one cares for me. David felt alone and forsaken, yet this very cry to God declares that David knew that even if he were forsaken by men, God had not forsaken him. Even if every other refuge has failed, David found in God an ear for the voice of his cry. Maclaren observed, “We have companions in joy; sorrow we have to face by ourselves. Unless we have Jesus with us in the darkness, we have no one.” Kidner added, “In the event, it seems that God answered abundantly, soon sending David’s ‘brothers and all his father’s house’ to join him in his cave, and then by degrees a company that would become the nucleus of his kingdom (1 Samuel 22:1f.). This low ebb in his fortunes proved in fact to be a turning point.”

#### Psalm 142:5-7 - Deliver Me from My Persecutors.

The final section ties the whole psalm together. In v.5, ‘I cry to you’ echoes v.1, while ‘you are my refuge’ echoes v.4; and ‘I am brought very low’ (v.6) summarises vv.3-4. This section enables the faithful to pray with boldness and with confidence in the Lord’s unflagging care. The person praying recognises how he should respond when he sees the answer ‘that I may give thanks to your name’ (v.7) and expects all the righteous to rejoice with him. As so often is the case in the psalms, personal experiences of blessing profit the whole people; refer to the comments made on Psalms 109:30-31 and 116:12-19.

<sup>5</sup> I cry to you, O Lord;  
I say, ‘You are my refuge,  
my portion in the land of the living.’

#### Psalm 142:5

You are my refuge. Among men, David had no refuge (v.4). Yet has he cried out to God, David could confidently proclaim that God was indeed his refuge. The cities of refuge were for the protection of an Israelite in special circumstances, and David found his place of refuge not in a place or in a particular circumstance, but in the Lord himself. Spurgeon noted, “If David had not cried he would not have said; and if the Lord had not been his refuge he would never have been his portion. The lower step is as needful as the higher.”

My portion in the land of the living. Many times in David’s seasons as a fugitive he had reason to believe that all his inheritance in this world was gone. In such times he had the confidence that God himself was his portion, his inheritance: <<**The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot**>> (Psalm 16:5). Of course, David was also part of the Lord’s portion: <<**the Lord’s own portion was**

*his people, Jacob his allotted share*>> (Deuteronomy 32:9). David also knew that he would benefit from this portion in the land of the living, in the here and now, not only in the age to come. Kidner remarked, “To say ‘my portion’ goes as far beyond this as love goes beyond fear. The TEV brings out the great force of this word by the phrase ‘you are all I want’.”

- 6 Give heed to my cry,  
for I am brought very low.  
Save me from my persecutors,  
for they are too strong for me.
- 7 Bring me out of prison,  
so that I may give thanks to your name.  
The righteous will surround me,  
for you will deal bountifully with me.

#### Psalm 142:6-7

Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low. David once again brought his cry to the Lord, this time honestly confessing his low circumstances: <<*Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit*>> (Psalm 17:1). David did not feel a need to pretend that everything was fine or that he was not weak; he could come to God for help even when brought very low by persecutors who were stronger than David.

Save me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. This means that David well understood his present weakness. The one who killed Goliath felt himself to be very weak - and actually, that was a good place for David to be. God’s strength would soon flood his life: <<*For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him*>> (Jeremiah 31:11). Spurgeon commented, “You always hear about Jacob’s wrestling. Well, I dare say he did; but it was not Jacob who was the principal wrestler. The wrestling was to take all his strength out of him; and when his strength was gone, then God called him a prince. Now, David was to be king over all Israel. What was the way to Jerusalem for David? What was the way to the throne? Well, it was round by the cave of Adullam.”

Bring me out of prison. This was likely a figure of speech, yet David felt constrained and bound in his soul. He longed to be free from this sense, so that he could praise God’s name.

**So that I may give thanks to your name.** Although his cry came from a great sense of humility and weakness, David ended this psalm with great confidence:

- David began the song with complaint (v.2); he closes confident of praise to come.
- David began the song with a great sense of isolation (v.4); he closes with confidence in soon companionship and support from the righteous.
- David began with the sense of being low and weak (v.6); he closes confident in God's future goodness, knowing that God would deal bountifully with him.

**The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.** David concludes this psalm with a statement of faith that the Lord would see him through this time of trouble. Those who had remained faithful to God would also remain true to David for they would understand that he was a victim of Saul and not a traitor to the nation or its God. Thus the sorrows of this present world teach all believers to have their hearts attuned to the praise of the Lord always.