

Jeremiah 20:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause.

Analysis

Jeremiah appeals to God as the righteous judge who tests hearts and minds (bochen tsaddiq roeh kelayot valev—'tests the righteous, sees kidneys and heart'). In Hebrew anthropology, the kidneys and heart represent the innermost being—emotions, desires, and will. The prophet asks God to vindicate him by executing vengeance on his persecutors, for he has committed his cause entirely to the LORD.

This imprecatory prayer (calling for judgment on enemies) is not personal vindictiveness but an appeal for divine justice. Jeremiah's persecutors are not merely his enemies but God's enemies, opposing His word and purposes. The prophet's request for vengeance is actually his relinquishing of personal revenge—he commits his cause to God rather than taking matters into his own hands. This models Romans 12:19: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'

The phrase 'let me see thy vengeance on them' reveals Jeremiah's desire for vindication in this life, to witness God's justice executed on those who opposed His word. While some vindication came during the prophet's lifetime (Jerusalem's fall confirmed his message), complete justice awaits the final judgment. This tension between present suffering and future vindication characterizes Christian experience—we groan with creation, awaiting redemption's completion (Romans 8:22-23).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture placed high value on honor and shame. Jeremiah's public humiliation in the stocks was not merely physically painful but socially devastating, marking him as someone worthy of contempt. His appeal for vengeance seeks restoration of his honor through divine vindication. Unlike pagan gods whose justice was capricious, Yahweh is the righteous judge who truly sees and perfectly judges the hearts of all people.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How should we understand biblical imprecatory prayers in light of Christ's command to love our enemies?
2. What is the difference between committing our cause to God and taking personal revenge?
3. How does knowing that God tests our hearts motivate us toward authenticity in our walk with Him?

Interlinear Text

כְּלִי וְתִּהְיֶה הַ	צָבָאוֹת	בְּחַן	צַדִּיק	אֶרְאֶה	וְתִּהְיֶה הַ
But O LORD	of hosts	that triest	the righteous	and seest	the reins
H3068	H6635	H974	H6662	H7200	H3629
אֶל יָדְךָ יְיָ	אֶרְאֶה הַ	נִקְמָתְךָ	יָמֶךָ	כִּי	בְּ
and the heart	and seest	thy vengeance			
H3820	H7200	H5360	H1992	H3588	H413
גַּל יְהִי	אֶת	רִיבִי:			
on them for unto thee have I opened		my cause			
H1540	H853	H7379			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 62:8 (Parallel theme): Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

Jeremiah 11:20 (Righteousness): But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

Psalms 54:7 (Parallel theme): For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies.

Psalms 59:10 (Parallel theme): The God of my mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies.

Jeremiah 17:10 (References Lord): I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Psalms 7:9 (Righteousness): Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.

Psalms 139:23 (Parallel theme): Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

Isaiah 37:14 (References Lord): And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

Psalms 11:5 (Righteousness): The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

Psalms 17:3 (Parallel theme): Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.

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