

Psalms 12:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from
him that puffeth at him.

Analysis

For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

This verse dramatically shifts from lament (vv.1-4) to divine promise. After describing corrupt speech and societal evil, the psalm suddenly presents God's first-person declaration of intervention. This is the LORD's direct response to injustice—He will arise to deliver the oppressed.

"For the oppression of the poor" (mishod aniyim, מִשְׁחָד אֲנִיִּים) provides the cause prompting divine action. Shod means violence, devastation, destruction, oppression. Aniyim describes the afflicted, poor, humble—those lacking resources and power to defend themselves. Throughout Scripture, God shows particular concern for the vulnerable. Exodus 22:21-24 warns: "If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot."

"For the sighing of the needy" (menaḥat evyonim, מְנַחַת עֲבְיוֹנִים) parallels the oppression phrase, emphasizing the suffering of the powerless. Anah means groan, sigh—sounds of deep distress and suffering. Evyonim describes the needy, destitute—those lacking basic necessities. Their sighs and groans reach God's ears. Psalm 10:17 promises: "LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."

"Now will I arise, saith the LORD" (attah aqum yomar Yahweh, עַתָּה אָקוּם יְהוָה) marks decisive divine intervention. Attah (now) indicates the moment has come. Qum means rise up, stand up, take action—moving from apparent inactivity to powerful engagement. The phrase "saith the LORD" (yomar Yahweh) introduces divine oracle—this is God's direct word, His certain promise. When God arises, nothing can withstand Him. Psalm 68:1: "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered."

"I will set him in safety" (ashit beyesha, אָשִׁית בְּיָשֶׁע) promises divine deliverance. Yesha means safety, salvation, deliverance. God doesn't merely sympathize but actively delivers, placing the oppressed in secure position beyond their oppressors' reach. "From him that puffeth at him" (yafih lo, יַפִּיחַ לוֹ) describes the oppressor's attitude. Puach means puff, blow, snare—speaking contemptuously, dismissing, scorning. The oppressor treats the poor with contempt, puffing scornful words. But God will silence such scorn by delivering its victims.

Historical Context

God's concern for the oppressed and needy threads throughout redemptive history. The exodus narrative begins with God hearing Israel's groaning under Egyptian oppression: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant" (Exodus 2:24). The exodus became paradigmatic for God's character as deliverer of the oppressed.

Mosaic law included extensive protections for the vulnerable: widows, orphans, foreigners, poor. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 commanded prompt payment of poor workers' wages. Leviticus 19:9-10 required leaving harvest gleanings for the poor. The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) provided systemic economic reset preventing permanent poverty. These laws reflected God's heart for the needy.

Yet Israel often failed to practice justice. Prophets thundered against oppression: Amos condemned those who "sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6). Isaiah denounced those who "grind the faces of the poor" (Isaiah 3:15). Jeremiah condemned leaders who "judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge"

(Jeremiah 5:28). When Israel persisted in oppression, exile resulted.

Jesus identified with the poor and oppressed. He began His ministry by quoting Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He warned: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). James condemned favoritism toward the rich and oppression of the poor (James 2:1-9, 5:1-6).

Throughout church history, believers have responded to oppression by advocating for the vulnerable. Early Christians cared for widows and orphans. Medieval monasteries provided hospitality. Wilberforce fought slavery. The social gospel movement (despite theological errors) rightly emphasized concern for the poor. Liberation theology (despite excesses) highlighted God's solidarity with the oppressed. The psalm reminds us that God will arise to defend the needy—believers should align with His concern.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Who are the oppressed poor and sighing needy in your context, and how does God call you to respond to their suffering?
2. What does it mean that God promises to arise in response to oppression, and how should this shape both personal ethics and social engagement?
3. How can you avoid 'puffing' at the needy (treating them with contempt or dismissiveness) in attitudes, words, and systems?
4. What is the relationship between evangelism (proclaiming spiritual salvation) and addressing physical oppression and injustice?
5. How does Jesus's identification with 'the least of these' challenge Christians to see Him in the oppressed poor and needy?

Interlinear Text

מִשָּׁד	עֲנִיִּים	מִאֲנָקָה	אֶבִּי וְנִי	עֲתָה	
For the oppression	of the poor	for the sighing	of the needy	H6258	
H7701	H6041	H603	H34		
אֲקוּם	יֹאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶשֶׁת	בְּיָשׁוּעַ	יָפֹא יְהוָה
now will I arise	saith	the LORD	I will set	him in safety	from him that puffeth
H6965	H559	H3068	H7896	H3468	H6315
לִי					
H0					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 34:6 (References Lord): This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Proverbs 14:31 (Parallel theme): He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

James 5:4 (References Lord): Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

Isaiah 33:10 (Resurrection): Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself.

Psalms 10:12 (Resurrection): Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble.

Job 5:15 (Parallel theme): But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty.

Job 5:21 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.

Isaiah 19:20 (References Lord): And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because

of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them.

Psalms 10:18 (Parallel theme): To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

Psalms 10:5 (Parallel theme): His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org