

Psalms 140:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;

Analysis

Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man.

Psalm 140 opens with urgent petition for divine protection against human evil and violence. This is one of David's imprecatory psalms—prayers for God's judgment against enemies. While such prayers can seem troubling to modern readers, they reflect honest struggle with injustice and trust that God is the righteous judge who will vindicate the oppressed.

"Deliver me, O LORD" (לְצַדֵּךְ יְהָוָה/chaltzeni Yahweh) begins with strong appeal. Chalatz means to rescue, snatch away, pull out, deliver from danger. This is desperate plea for intervention, not casual request. The use of "Yahweh" (יהָוָה) invokes God's covenant name, appealing to His faithful commitment to protect His people. David's relationship with God permits bold, direct petition.

"From the evil man" (מֵעֲדֵם רָע me'adam ra) identifies the threat. Adam simply means man, human. Ra means evil, wicked, harmful, bad. The singular "man" may indicate a specific enemy or represent evil people generally. David faced many "evil men" during his life—Saul's murderous jealousy, Absalom's treacherous rebellion, enemies seeking his destruction. Evil here isn't abstract concept but concrete human malice directed against God's servant.

"Preserve me" (תִּצְרֹעַ/tintzreni) from natsar means to guard, watch over, protect, keep. This goes beyond one-time deliverance to ongoing protection. David asks God not just to rescue him from immediate danger but to guard him continuously

against future threats. This reflects understanding that spiritual warfare is ongoing, requiring constant divine protection.

"From the violent man" (מִשְׁאָמָר שָׁאָל/mi'shar sha'al) specifies the nature of threat. Chamasan (plural form) means violence, wrong, cruelty, injustice. These are not merely opponents but violent aggressors who use force, intimidation, and oppression. The plural form in Hebrew intensifies the meaning—extreme violence, habitual cruelty, persistent aggression. David faces not just opposition but violent assault.

Historical Context

David's life provides extensive context for this prayer. As a young shepherd, he faced lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34-36). As Saul's servant, he faced the king's javelin thrown in murderous rage (1 Samuel 18:11). For years he fled through wilderness caves, constantly hunted by Saul's army (1 Samuel 23-26). Even after becoming king, he faced Absalom's violent rebellion (2 Samuel 15-18), Shimei's cursing (2 Samuel 16:5-13), and numerous military campaigns against violent enemies.

Imprecatory psalms—prayers calling for God's judgment on enemies—comprise a significant portion of the Psalter (Psalms 35, 69, 109, 137, 140). These can trouble modern readers accustomed to Jesus's command to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). However, several factors explain these prayers:

1. They express honest emotion to God rather than taking personal vengeance
2. They call for God's justice rather than personal revenge
3. They recognize that evil must be judged and cannot be tolerated indefinitely
4. They express solidarity with oppressed and suffering people throughout history who cry out for justice.

The distinction between "the evil man" and "the violent man" may reflect different types of opposition David faced.

Some enemies worked through deception, slander, and conspiracy (evil). Others used direct physical violence, warfare, and armed assault (violent). David

experienced both, requiring different forms of divine protection.

For persecuted Christians throughout history—facing Roman persecution, medieval torture, Communist oppression, Islamic extremism, or contemporary martyrdom—these psalms have given voice to suffering and hope for divine justice. They don't justify personal revenge but acknowledge that God is the righteous judge who will ultimately vindicate His people and punish evil.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How can believers pray honestly about enemies and injustice while also obeying Jesus's command to love and pray for enemies?
2. What is the difference between asking God to deliver from evil people versus taking personal revenge?
3. How do imprecatory psalms validate the suffering of oppressed people throughout history who cry out for God's justice?
4. In what ways might believers today face 'evil' opposition (deception, slander) versus 'violent' opposition (persecution, physical threat)?
5. How does bringing honest anger and fear to God in prayer differ from harboring bitterness or taking vigilante justice?

Interlinear Text

מַלְאֵךְ נִי
Deliver me O LORD
H2502

מִן־הָרָא
me O LORD
H3068

מִן־מֵן
man
H120

מִן־עֵילָוֹת
from the evil
H7451

מִן־מֵן
man
H376

מִן־מִן־מִן
me from the violent
H2555

תָּמִיכָה

preserve
H5341

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 18:48 (Parallel theme): He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

Psalms 140:4 (Evil): Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings.

Psalms 71:4 (Evil): Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

Psalms 140:11 (Evil): Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.

Psalms 17:13 (Evil): Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword:

Psalms 43:1 (Parallel theme): Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.