

# Psalms 140:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,  
and the right of the poor.

## Analysis

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**I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.** This verse expresses settled confidence in God's character as defender of the oppressed. After describing wicked enemies and petitioning for deliverance, David declares certain knowledge of how God operates—He vindicates the afflicted and defends the poor.

"I know" (יְדַעְתִּי/yada'ti) uses yada, meaning to know by experience, understand intimately, be convinced of. This isn't theoretical belief or wishful hope but settled conviction based on character and experience. The perfect tense indicates completed knowledge—David has already come to this conclusion through observation of God's ways and personal experience of His faithfulness.

"That the LORD will maintain" (יְהִי עֲשֵׂה יְהָוָה/ya'aseh Yahweh) from asah means to do, make, accomplish, execute. The imperfect tense indicates future certainty: God WILL act. He will execute justice, accomplish vindication, and perform what needs to be done. This isn't passive sympathy but active intervention on behalf of the oppressed.

"The cause of the afflicted" (עֲנֵי דִין/din ani) links two important concepts. Din means judgment, legal case, cause, plea for justice. Ani means afflicted, humble, poor, oppressed—those suffering under difficult circumstances. God will take up their legal case, plead their cause, execute judgment on their behalf. He serves as advocate, defender, and judge for those who cannot defend themselves.

"And the right of the poor" (מִשְׁפָט אֶבְיוֹנִים/mishpat evyonim) reinforces the point with parallel construction. Mishpat means justice, judgment, rights, what is due. Evyon means poor, needy, in want—those lacking resources and power. God will ensure the poor receive justice, that their rights are upheld, that they receive what is due them. In a world where the powerful exploit the powerless, God stands as champion of the vulnerable.

## Historical Context

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This theological conviction—that God defends the afflicted and poor—runs throughout Scripture as a central aspect of God's character. The Mosaic law contained extensive protections for vulnerable populations: widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor (Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 24:17-22). God declared: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry" (Exodus 22:22-23).

The prophets repeatedly condemned Israel's oppression of the poor and defended God's concern for the marginalized. Isaiah 1:17 commands: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Jeremiah 22:16 commends Josiah: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD." Amos thundered against those who "oppress the poor" and "crush the needy" (Amos 4:1).

Throughout David's life, he experienced being both the oppressed (fleeing from Saul) and the king with power to defend the oppressed. His experience of God's defense during years of persecution built conviction that God characteristically defends the afflicted. This wasn't abstract theology but lived reality.

Jesus embodied this divine concern for the marginalized. His inaugural sermon declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor...to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). He blessed the poor and pronounced woes on the rich (Luke 6:20, 24). James 2:5 declares: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?"

Liberation theology has emphasized this biblical theme, though sometimes problematically conflating spiritual and political liberation. Nevertheless, Scripture unambiguously teaches that God has special concern for the poor and oppressed, requiring His people to share that concern through just systems, generous provision, and sacrificial advocacy.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does knowing that God maintains the cause of the afflicted and poor shape a believer's response to injustice?
2. What is the relationship between God defending the poor and His people's responsibility to advocate for justice?
3. How should churches and Christians balance spiritual ministry with addressing material poverty and systemic injustice?
4. In what ways might believers be complicit in oppressing the poor, and how does this verse call for repentance and change?
5. How does Jesus's identification with the poor and His promise to judge based on treatment of 'the least of these' (Matthew 25:31-46) fulfill this psalm's theology?

## Interlinear Text

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עַתָּה יְהֹוָה יְמִינָה יְמִינָה יְמִינָה  
I know will maintain that the LORD the cause of the afflicted  
H3045 H3588 H6213 H3068 H1779 H6041

אֶת־אַבְדָּנִים מִשְׁפָּט  
and the right of the poor  
H4941 H34

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 9:4** (Parallel theme): For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.

**1 Kings 8:49** (Parallel theme): Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

**1 Kings 8:45** (Parallel theme): Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

**Psalms 102:17** (Parallel theme): He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

**Psalms 35:10** (References Lord): All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?

**Jeremiah 22:16** (References Lord): He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD.

**Matthew 11:5** (Parallel theme): The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

**Isaiah 11:4** (Parallel theme): But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

**Psalms 22:24** (Parallel theme): For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

**Psalms 72:4** (Parallel theme): He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

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