

Psalms 140:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings.

Analysis

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. After describing enemies' evil character and methods (vv. 2-3), David returns to direct petition for divine protection. "Keep me, O LORD" (shomreni YHWH, שְׁמַרְנִי יְהָוָה) uses shamar (שְׁמַר), meaning "to keep, guard, watch, preserve"—active protection against threat. This verb describes watchmen guarding cities (2 Samuel 18:24-27), shepherds guarding flocks (Genesis 30:31), and notably God's covenant keeping (Deuteronomy 7:9). David appeals to God as guardian who doesn't sleep or slumber (Psalm 121:3-4).

"From the hands of the wicked" (mi-yedei rasha, מֵיָּד רָשָׁע) identifies the threat. Yad (יד, "hand") represents power to execute evil plans. Rasha (רָשָׁע, "wicked") describes those guilty of moral wrong, hostile to righteousness. David needs protection from their ability to harm, not just their intentions. Without divine intervention, human wickedness succeeds in destroying the righteous.

"Preserve me from the violent man" (me-ish chamasim titzreni, מֵאִישׁ חַמָּסִים תִּצְרֵנִי) parallels the first petition with slightly different emphasis. Natsar (נָצַר, "preserve") means "to guard, keep, observe"—similar to shamar but emphasizing careful watching. Chamas (חַמָּס, "violence") indicates physical force, brutality, injustice. The plural chamasim suggests "violent deeds" or "men of violence." David faces enemies who combine moral wickedness with physical aggression.

"Who have purposed to overthrow my goings" (asher chashvu lidchot pe'amai, אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁבְוּ לִדְחוֹת פְּעָמָי) specifies their goal. Chashav (חָשַׁב, "purposed") is the same verb from v. 2 ("imagine mischiefs")—deliberate planning. Dachah (דָּחַת, "overthrow, thrust down") means "to push, topple, bring to ruin." Pe'am (פְּעָמָה, "goings, steps") represents one's life path or course. Enemies plan to derail David's God-appointed destiny, preventing him from fulfilling his calling as king.

Historical Context

David's prayers for protection from violent enemies reflect his actual life-threatening situations. Saul repeatedly tried to kill David with spear (1 Samuel 18:10-11, 19:9-10), sent assassins to his house (1 Samuel 19:11), and pursued him with armies (1 Samuel 23:25-26, 24:1-2, 26:1-3). Absalom's rebellion sought David's death (2 Samuel 17:1-4). Even within David's court, some sought his overthrow (Psalm 41:5-9). Yet remarkably, David survived decades of such threats, repeatedly crediting God's protection (1 Samuel 26:24, 2 Samuel 22:1-4). This pattern established David's confidence that God preserves His anointed despite overwhelming opposition—confidence that transfers to Messiah, who despite crucifixion accomplished God's purpose and rose victorious (Acts 2:22-24).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to ask God to 'keep' you from wicked hands rather than taking revenge into your own hands?
2. How does David's appeal to God for protection against those 'who have purposed to overthrow my goings' encourage believers facing opposition to their God-given calling?

3. How does God's faithful protection of David despite overwhelming enemies give confidence that God preserves His people through persecution?

Interlinear Text

שְׁמַרְנִי	מִיְדִי	מִיָּדָה	רָשָׁע	מֵאִישׁ	מִמְּסִים
Keep me O LORD from the hands of the wicked man me from the violent					
H8104 H3068 H3027 H7563 H376 H2555					

פָּנָתִים	לְדֹחַ וְתַ	מִשְׁבָּבָה	אֲשֶׁר	תִּתְאַכֵּלְנִי
preserve who have purposed to overthrow my goings				
H5341 H834 H2803 H1760 H6471				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 36:11 (Evil): Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me.

Psalms 17:5 (Parallel theme): Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.

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.

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