

Psalms 143:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

Analysis

And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant. Psalm 143 concludes with imprecatory petition—prayer for God's judgment on enemies. Modern readers often find such prayers troubling, but they reflect honest faith that brings injustice to the righteous Judge rather than taking personal vengeance. David's final appeal rests on servant relationship: because he belongs to God, God has obligation to defend him.

"And of thy mercy" (בְּנַסְעָדֶךָ/uvchashdekha) remarkably grounds request for judgment in God's covenant love. Chesed means lovingkindness, mercy, covenant faithfulness, steadfast love. This seems paradoxical: praying for enemies' destruction based on God's mercy. Yet God's covenant love toward His people necessarily includes opposition to their enemies. Mercy to the oppressed requires judgment on oppressors. God's faithful love protects His people from those who seek to destroy them.

"Cut off mine enemies" (תִּצְמִית אֹבֶד/tatzmit oyevai) is direct petition for judgment. Tzamit in Hiphil means to destroy, annihilate, cut off, silence. Oyev means enemy, adversary, foe. David asks God to eliminate those who oppose him. This isn't personal revenge ("I will cut off") but appeal to divine justice ("You cut off"). David commits vengeance to God rather than taking it himself.

"And destroy all them that afflict my soul" (וְהִבְדִּיל־צְרָרֵי נֶפֶשׁ/veha'avadta kol-tzorerey nafshi) intensifies the petition. Avad in Hiphil means to destroy, eliminate,

cause to perish. Tzarar means to be narrow, restrict, cause distress, oppress. Nefesh (soul) represents the whole person. David's enemies aren't merely annoying but genuinely threatening—they afflict his soul, assault his being, seek his destruction. He asks God to destroy destroyers, to eliminate those who oppress His servant.

"For I am thy servant" (כִּי עֲבָדָךְ אָנִי/ki avdekha-ani) provides final basis for petition. Eved means servant, slave, bondservant. The possessive form emphasizes relationship: "I am YOUR servant." This isn't arrogant claim of personal worthiness but humble appeal to covenant relationship. Because David belongs to God as servant, God has responsibility to protect and defend him. Masters defend their servants; lords protect their vassals; God vindicates those who serve Him.

Historical Context

Imprecatory psalms—prayers calling for God's judgment on enemies—include Psalms 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 109, 137, and 143. These troubling prayers require careful theological understanding. Several factors explain them:

1. They express honest emotion to God rather than suppressing feelings or taking personal revenge.
2. They call for divine justice, not personal vengeance—"You judge" not "I'll punish."
3. They recognize that evil must ultimately be judged and cannot be tolerated indefinitely.
4. They give voice to oppressed people throughout history crying out for justice.

David's life provided ample reason for such prayers.

Saul pursued him murderously for years. Absalom rebelled and sought to kill him. Enemies constantly plotted against him. These weren't imaginary threats but real people seeking his destruction. Yet David consistently refused personal revenge, sparing Saul's life twice (1 Samuel 24, 26) and mourning Absalom's death (2 Samuel 18:33). He committed judgment to God while refusing to take vengeance himself.

Jesus's command to "love your enemies" and "pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44) doesn't contradict imprecatory psalms but transforms them. Jesus perfectly modeled this, praying from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Yet He also pronounced woes on scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23) and will return as conquering judge (Revelation 19:11-16).

Romans 12:19 commands: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." This principle underlies imprecatory psalms—committing vengeance to God rather than taking it ourselves. Revelation 6:10 records martyred saints crying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" This isn't sinful but righteous appeal for divine justice.

The identification as God's servant reflects biblical theology of belonging. Believers aren't autonomous individuals but purchased possession of God through Christ's blood (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Paul repeatedly identified himself as "servant of Christ" (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1). Because we belong to God, He defends us; because we serve Him, He vindicates us; because we're His possession, He protects us.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How can believers pray honestly about injustice and evil while also loving enemies and refusing personal revenge?
2. What is the difference between committing judgment to God (appropriate) versus taking personal vengeance (sinful)?
3. How do imprecatory psalms give voice to oppressed people throughout history who cry out for God's justice?
4. What does it mean practically to identify as God's servant, and how does this relationship provide basis for confidence in His protection?

5. How does Jesus's prayer from the cross ('Father, forgive them') both fulfill and transform the spirit of imprecatory psalms?

Interlinear Text

צְבָר	וְבִמְסֻדָּךְ	תִּתְּצַאֵם	אֵיךְ	כִּי	כָּל	כִּי	פָּאֵדֶת	וְבִמְסֻדָּךְ
And of thy mercy	cut off	mine enemies	and destroy				all them that afflict	
H2617	H6789	H341	H6				H3605	H6887

נַפְשִׁי	עֲבָדָנִי	אָנֹכִי	כִּי	עֲבָדָנִי	אָנֹכִי	כִּי	נַפְשִׁי
my soul	for I am thy servant						
H5315	H5650	H589					H3588

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 54:5 (Parallel theme): He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth.

Psalms 116:16 (Parallel theme): O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.

Psalms 119:94 (Parallel theme): I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.

Psalms 52:5 (Parallel theme): God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

Psalms 55:23 (Parallel theme): But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

1 Samuel 26:10 (Parallel theme): David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish.

1 Samuel 25:29 (Parallel theme): Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD

thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.

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