

Psalms 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.

Analysis

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. This verse shifts from petition to declaration, asserting a fundamental theological reality: God has separated the godly for His own possession and purposes. The emphatic "know" (de'u, יעד) is a command—an imperative plural addressing David's opponents to recognize divine truth they've ignored or rejected.

"The LORD hath set apart" (hiflah Yahweh, הִפָּלָה יְהוָה) uses palah, meaning to distinguish, make wonderful, set apart as special. The Hiphil causative form indicates God's active agency—He distinguishes and separates His people. This separation isn't geographical or ritual primarily but relational and moral. God has chosen, claimed, and consecrated "him that is godly" (chasid, חָסִיד) for Himself. Chasid derives from chesed (covenant faithfulness, loyal love) and describes one who demonstrates covenant loyalty to God—the godly, faithful, devoted one.

The phrase "for himself" (lo, לו) emphasizes God's personal claim and possession. The godly belong to God as His treasured possession, His special people. This echoes Exodus 19:5—"ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." Deuteronomy 7:6 declares God "chose thee to be a special people unto himself." This divine election and separation provide the foundation for David's confidence: because God has set him apart, God will defend His choice and vindicate His servant.

"The LORD will hear when I call unto him" is both promise and warning. For David, it's assurance: God hears those He's set apart. For David's enemies, it's a caution: opposing God's chosen one means opposing God Himself. The imperfect tense indicates ongoing, continual reality—God habitually, consistently hears the prayers of His people. This isn't occasional responsiveness but guaranteed divine attention. The basis for answered prayer is God's prior choice and covenant relationship, not human worthiness or perfect performance.

Theologically, this verse anticipates New Testament teaching on election and sanctification. God has chosen believers in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). Believers are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Our confidence in prayer rests not on personal merit but on God's sovereign choice and faithful covenant love. He who calls us is faithful and will hear us (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Historical Context

The concept of God setting apart His people for Himself permeates Israel's covenant theology. From Abraham's call to "get thee out of thy country" (Genesis 12:1) through the exodus deliverance and Sinai covenant, God repeatedly emphasized Israel's unique status among nations. The sacrificial system included offerings described as "set apart" or "holy to the LORD." The priesthood was consecrated, the Sabbath was sanctified, and the entire nation was to be "an holy people unto the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

David's appeal to being "set apart" carried particular force given his anointing by Samuel. When God rejected Saul and chose David, Samuel anointed him while still a shepherd boy: "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). This divine selection and Spirit-empowering set David apart as God's chosen king. Opposition to David wasn't merely political disagreement but rebellion against God's explicit choice. David's confidence in this psalm reflects assurance that God would vindicate His own selection and protect His anointed servant.

For New Testament believers, the principle of being "set apart" finds fulfillment in sanctification through Christ. Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit indwells believers, marking them as God's possession: "ye are not your own... ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Understanding our identity as God's set-apart people—chosen, redeemed, sealed by the Spirit—provides confidence that God hears our prayers and will complete His work in us (Philippians 1:6).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that God has 'set you apart for Himself' affect your sense of identity and security?
2. What does it mean practically to be 'godly' (chasid—one who demonstrates covenant faithfulness) in daily life?
3. How does knowing you belong to God as His 'special possession' influence how you handle opposition or criticism?
4. In what ways does God's prior choice of you (election) give confidence that He will hear your prayers?
5. How should the reality of being 'set apart' affect how you live in relation to the world around you?

Psalms 6:8 (References Lord): Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.

Psalms 50:5 (Parallel theme): Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Psalms 31:23 (References Lord): O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org