

Psalms 59:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.

Analysis

Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy. This concluding verse returns to themes introduced earlier, forming an inclusio (bookend structure) with the psalm's opening. "Unto thee, O my strength" (uzzi, עָזֶךְ) addresses God as "my strength, my power, my might." This contrasts with enemy strength (v.9) and God's power (v.16). David's strength isn't his own but derived from God. What David possesses as strength is actually God Himself.

"Will I sing" (azammerah, אָזַמְּרָה) uses the word for singing praise with musical accompaniment. This is the same word from 57:7 and throughout the Psalms describing musical worship. Even having described mortal danger from violent enemies, David commits to worship. Singing isn't contingent on favorable circumstances but flows from covenant relationship with God regardless of circumstances.

"For God is my defence" (ki-Elohim misgabi, כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁגַּבִּי) repeats exactly the phrase from verse 9. Misgav means high tower, fortress, secure elevated place. The repetition emphasizes this central truth: God Himself is David's fortress. Not fortifications David builds, not armies David commands, not strategies David devises, but God Himself functioning as impregnable defense.

"And the God of my mercy" (Elohei chasdi, אֱלֹהִי חִסְדֵּי) concludes by repeating the phrase from verse 10. "God of my covenant love" emphasizes God's committed, faithful, loyal love toward David. This covenant commitment guarantees God's

protective action. The verse ends where verse 10 began, forming a circular structure that emphasizes God's covenant faithfulness as the foundation for everything.

The entire psalm thus moves from urgent cry for deliverance (v.1-2) through description of enemies' violence (v.3-7), to confident trust in God (v.8-10), to appeal for divine judgment (v.11-15), to commitment to praise (v.16-17). This pattern—lament to trust to praise—characterizes biblical faith. Circumstances may be dire, but covenant relationship with the faithful God transforms fear into confidence and suffering into worship.

Historical Context

The psalm's structure reflects a well-established pattern in Israel's worship tradition. Lament psalms typically moved from crisis to confidence, from plea to praise, modeling faith's journey through trouble. This pattern wasn't merely literary device but theological instruction—teaching believers how to process fear, danger, and suffering through covenant relationship with God.

The emphasis on God as 'strength' resonates throughout David's story. As a shepherd boy facing Goliath, David declared: 'The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine' (1 Samuel 17:37). David's strength wasn't physical prowess but God's empowerment. Throughout his life, whether facing Philistines, Saul's persecution, or Absalom's rebellion, David's strength was consistently God's enabling power.

The title 'God of my mercy' reflects the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7). God promised David an eternal dynasty, declaring: 'My mercy shall not depart away from him' (2 Samuel 7:15). This covenant guarantee provided unshakeable foundation for David's confidence. Even when circumstances threatened David's life and throne, God's covenant commitment remained constant. The Davidic covenant ultimately finds fulfillment in Christ, David's descendant who reigns forever.

For Israel throughout its tumultuous history—invansion, exile, subjugation by foreign powers—Psalm 59 provided prayer language during persecution. When powerful enemies rose up against vulnerable Israel, God's people echoed David's cry for deliverance and his confidence in the God of covenant love. The psalm taught that appropriate response to danger isn't merely strategic planning or military preparation but crying out to the covenant-keeping God.

Early Christians facing Roman persecution found this psalm particularly meaningful. When imperial power declared Christianity illegal, when believers were hunted and martyred, they sang psalms as acts of defiance and faith. Singing 'God is my defence' in Roman prisons or facing lions in arenas was revolutionary testimony—proclaiming that the God of covenant love provides security even when earthly security is stripped away. Their willingness to die singing demonstrated that God was indeed their strength, defence, and covenant love.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to address God as 'my strength' rather than merely acknowledging He possesses strength, and how does this reflect dependence versus independence?
2. How does the psalm's circular structure—beginning and ending with God as 'defence' and 'God of my mercy'—emphasize covenant faithfulness as the foundation for faith?
3. Why does David commit to sing 'unto' God rather than merely 'about' God, and how does this indicate worship is fundamentally relational rather than merely expressive?

4. How can believers today move from the urgent cry of verse 1 to the confident praise of verse 17, and what does this progression teach about processing trouble through faith?
5. In what ways does recognizing God as both 'defence' (protection from enemies) and 'God of my mercy' (covenant relationship) provide comprehensive security—both external protection and internal assurance?

Interlinear Text

עֲזֵב	אֶלְעָזֵר	אָזַם בָּה	פִּי	מִשְׁגַּב	אֱלֹהִים
Unto thee O my strength		will I sing		and the God	is my defence
H5797	H413	H2167	H3588	H430	H4869
and the God	of my mercy				
H430	H2617				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 46:1 (References God): God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalms 18:1 (Parallel theme): I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.

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