

Psalm 140

Prayer for deliverance from evil men
To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 140: Psalms 140 to 143 may be linked together since they all portray, though in different ways, the godly response to trials. All four are prayers, and all four are written by David, though only Psalm 142 contains a historical notice in the superscription. The situation underlying Psalm 140 itself is clear from the first verse: David is being threatened by his enemies. They are quite adequately described in his lament (verses 1-5), but David turns to God with his petition against them (verses 6-11), confident that he will be heard (verses 12-13).

Verses 1-13: Davidic authorship is stated here, but the circumstances are unknown. It is like the psalms earlier in the Psalter that feature the usual complaint, prayer, and confident hope of relief.

- I. Concerning David (140:1-5).
 - A. "Deliver Me" (140:1-3);
 - B. "Protect Me" (140:4-5).
- II. Concerning David's Enemies (140:6-11).
 - A. "Thwart Them" (140:6-8);
 - B. "Punish Them" (140:9-11).
- III. Concerning the Lord (140:12-13).

Verses 1-3: The emphasis here is deliverance from evil plans.

Psalm 140:1 "Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;"

That is, evidently from some particular man who was endeavoring to injure him. Some personal enemy. All the circumstances mentioned agree well with the supposition that Saul is intended.

"Preserve me from the violent man": Margin, as in Hebrew, "man of violence's." That is, one who has committed violence so often. Who has so frequently done wrong, that this may be considered a characteristic of the man. This would apply well to the repeated acts of Saul in persecuting David, and endeavoring to do him injury.

This Psalm is certainly from David, crying out to the only help he has. He was persecuted and even hunted down by Saul, but this goes even further than that. David knew persecution and sorrow from his own son as well. The evil man mentioned here however, is probably Saul. David does not specifically speak of an individual. This makes this Psalm a prayer that any of us could pray to God. Satan is after all of us who are trying to live for God. The name of the violent man may not be the same in our case, but certainly there is a violent man in each of our problems.

Psalm 140:2 "Which imagine mischiefs in [their] heart; continually are they gathered together [for] war."

Here the language is changed to the plural number in the Hebrew, implying that while there was one man who was eminent in his wickedness and his wrong-doing, there were many others associated with him, acting under his direction. The word "mischiefs" in the Hebrew means "evils; wickedness's." It was not a single purpose; the plan embraced many forms of evil, doing him wrong in every way possible.

"Continually are they gathered together for war": They are organized for this purpose; they are constantly prepared for it. The word rendered "gathered together" properly means to sojourn, to dwell for a time. And it has been proposed by some to render this, "All the day they dwell with wars." That is, they are constantly involved in them. But the word may mean also "to gather together" (as in Psalm 56:6).

Evil men have evil hearts and their imaginations, which come from this evil heart are also evil. Evil people have no peace. The only way they think they can satisfy their evil heart, is to bring war to those at peace. They feel, they can make themselves feel better, if they can take something that does not belong to them. These people are not peacemakers, they are warmongers.

Psalm 140:3 "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison [is] under their lips. Selah."

“Serpent”: A type of snake (compare Rom. 3:13), signifying cunning and venom.

The most cutting weapon a person has is an evil tongue. Just as poison is in the bite of the serpent, there is poison coming from the tongue of this evil person. The tongue is the vilest part of the body. The tongue can not only wound a person's body, but can literally break his heart. This is why it is so important to give your tongue to God. We all need to bridle our tongue.

Verses 4-5: The emphasis here is protection from being captured.

Psalm 140:4 "Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings."

From falling into their hands (and the weight of them). And from their laying hands on him, being men of power and authority.

"Preserve me from the violent man": Or men, every one of them (see notes on Psalm 140:1).

"Who have purposed to overthrow my goings": To supplant him. To cause him to stumble and fall, to his disgrace and reproach. And that they might take an advantage of him, and an occasion against him. Arama interprets it, to drive me out of the land of Israel (see 1 Sam. 26:1). So

Christ's enemies thought to have supplanted him, and have found something against him, to accuse him of to Caesar (Matt. 22:15).

To be in the hands of the wicked would be a terrible tragedy. The Israelites in Egypt felt the tragedy of just such a thing happening to them. This evil Pharaoh had made them work like animals. The World War 2 men, on the death march, could tell you how bad it is to fall into the hands of the wicked. The wicked have no moral code, so they have no feeling for anyone else. David was praying, whatever happened, God please do not let him fall into wicked hands. These wicked men thought of nothing night and day, but to overthrow David and take over themselves.

Psalm 140:5 "The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah."

Haughty; arrogant; oppressive men (see notes on Psalms 35:7 and 57:6).

"And cords": Strings; twine; as those do who lay a net to catch birds, and who design to spring it upon them unawares.

"They have spread a net by the wayside": Where I may be expected to walk, and where it may be suddenly sprung upon me.

"They have set gins for me": Snares, toils, such as are set for wild beasts. The meaning is, that they had not only made open war upon him, but they had sought to bring him into an ambush. To rush upon him suddenly when he was not on his guard, and did not know that danger was near.

They may act proud, but this is a sneaky way to fight. They set traps for him, instead of coming face to face with him. Gins, in the verse above, means a noose like they catch animals with. Selah is a time to pause and think on these things.

Verses 6-8: The emphasis here is upon God's thwarting the plans of David's enemy.

Psalm 140:6 "I said unto the LORD, Thou [art] my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD."

In all these dangers from open war, in all these perils from a crafty enemy lying in ambush. My only refuge was God; my hope was in him alone. From all these dangers, seen and unseen, I knew that he could defend me. And I confidently believed that he would.

There was never a question in David's mind that he belonged to God. We must learn from David about this also. Even though our enemies seem to be surrounding us, we must never forget that the Lord is our God. This is almost a desperate cry from David saying, you are my only help, don't let me down.

Psalm 140:7 "O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle."

“Covered my head”: Because the “head” is a vulnerable area, it requires maximum protection (Eph. 6:17), in any potentially dangerous situation, but especially “in the day of battle”. This is a metaphor about protecting oneself spiritual, especially one’s mind.

God has figuratively been David’s helmet in battle.

David in looking back, knows that God had protected him from harm so many times before. In all of David's battles, God had covered his head from harm. The covering that David had been blessed with was the presence of the Lord. When David fought, he fought in the name of the Most High God. We can learn a lesson from this too. When we fight the battles in our life, do not try to fight them on your own. Fight them in the name of Jesus. Stand against the devil in the name of the Lord and he will flee from you. Our salvation is in our belief in the name of Jesus.

Psalm 140:8 "Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; [lest] they exalt themselves. Selah."

Of Doeg, as the Targum, and of other wicked men, who were desirous both of taking him, and of taking away his life. But the desires of such men are under the restraints of the Lord. Nor can they fulfil them unless they have leave from him, which is here deprecated. The psalmist entreats he might not be delivered up to their will, or they have their will of him (see Psalm 27:12). Jarchi interprets it of Esau (as in Psalm 140:1); and it is applicable enough to antichrist and his wicked followers. Who, could they have their desires, would root the Gospel, and the interest of Christ and his people, out of the world.

"Further not his wicked device": Or, "let not his wicked device come forth", or proceed to execution, or be brought to perfection. Let him be disappointed in it, that he may not be able to perform his enterprise, or execute his designs. Which cannot be done without the divine permission. The Rabbins, as Jarchi and others, render it, "let not his bridle come out". The bridle out of his jaws, with which he was held by the Lord, and restrained from doing his will. Let him not be left to his liberty, and freed from the restraints of divine Providence (see Isa. 37:29).

"Lest they exalt themselves": Grow proud, haughty, and insolent to God and man (see Deut. 32:27). Or, "let them not be exalted"; upon the ruin of me and my friends.

Selah is a time to pause and think on these things.

David should be saying here; I know that you will not grant their wicked desires. David knows, and we should know, that the wicked do not even believe in God, so why would they pray to Him? We know that all of humanity, good or bad, is dependent upon the workings of God, whether they are aware of it or not. God will not help further the wicked against His own people. They would have to exalt themselves, because God would not exalt them. We must pause a moment and think on these things.

Verses 9-11: The emphasis here is upon God's turning their evil plans back on them in judgment.

Psalm 140:9 "[As for] the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them."

Luther renders this, "The calamity which my enemies design against me must fall upon their own heads." The passage stands in contrast with (Psalm 140:7). "Thou hast covered my head," etc. As for his own head, it had been protected in the day of battle. In reference now to the heads of his enemies, of those that compassed him about, he prays that what they had designed for "his" head might come by a just retribution on their own. The phrase "compass me about" refers to his enemies as being numerous, and as surrounding him on every side (see Psalms 40:12; 88:17; 109:3; 118:10-12).

"Let the mischief of their own lips cover them": Come upon them. The mischief which they have designed against me; that which they have conspired to bring on me. The reference is to a combination against him, or to some agreement which they had made to destroy him.

This is saying, let their own sin fall upon their head. They may surround me with wickedness, but no harm will come unto me. This is usually the very thing that does happen to those who say evil things about others, these very evil things come home to rest upon their own head.

Psalm 140:10 "Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again."

Let them be punished, "as if" burning coals were poured upon them (see notes on Psalms 11:6; 18:12-13; 120:4).

"Let them be cast into the fire": Punished as if they were cast into the fire and consumed.

"Into deep pits, that they rise not up again": That they may utterly perish. This was one mode of punishing, by casting a man into a deep pit from which he could not escape, and leaving him to die (Gen 37:20; 37:24; Psalms 9:15; 35:7; Jer. 41:7).

In the 25th chapter of Proverbs, we read about the enemies of those who are living for God. It says that God will heap coals of fire upon their head. David is saying, if these coals come from above, it will leave no doubt that God is the one punishing them. We do know that if they do not repent of their evil ways, there is a lake of fire awaiting them.

Psalm 140:11 "Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow [him]."

literally, "A man of tongue." That is, a man whom the tongue rules. A man of an unbridled tongue. A man who does not control his tongue (see notes at James 3:2-12).

"Be established in the earth": Be successful or prosperous; let him not carry out his designs. It is not desirable that a man should prosper in such purposes. And therefore, this is not a prayer of malignity, but of benevolence.

"Evil shall hunt the violent man": More literally, "A man of violence, a bad man, they shall hunt him down speedily;" or, "let him be hunted down speedily. Let him who forms a project of violence and wrong, a bad man, be hunted as the beasts of prey are, and let his destruction come quickly." Margin, "Let him be hunted to his overthrow." But the explanation now given suits the connection, and is a literal expression of the sense of the original.

An evil speaker would be full of lies. For an evil one to be established in the land would do the same thing as one rotten apple in a barrel. Pretty soon the whole land would be bad. The violent man has sown the wrong kind of seed. The seed that he planted was violence. The crop that he receives from his planting, will be violence, as well. If you live by violence, you shall die by violence.

Verses 12-13: David expresses unshakeable confidence in the character of God and the outcome for the righteous (compare Psalms 10:17-18; 74:21; 82:3-4).

Psalm 140:12 "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, [and] the right of the poor."

See the notes at (Psalm 9:4). The psalmist here doubtless refers primarily to himself, as having a confident belief that the Lord would maintain "his" cause, or would defend "him." At the same time, he makes the statement general, implying that what would be done to him would be done to all in similar circumstances. The idea is that God, in all his attributes, in all his providential arrangements, in all his interpositions on earth, would be found to be on the side of the oppressed, the afflicted, and the wronged. He has no attribute that can take part with an oppressor or a wrong doer. The wicked cannot come to him with the belief that he will be on their side. The righteous, the oppressed, the afflicted can.

"And the right of the poor": He will defend the right of the poor. Literally, "The judgment of the poor." That which will be just and right in their case.

All through the Bible, God has been on the side of the oppressed and the poor. The wealthy prominent person can take care of his own. God helps those who actually need His help. Notice the emphatic statement of David here, I know. We can all take heart of the fact, that the Lord cares for His own.

Psalm 140:13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

Unto thee.

(1) They will have occasion to do it;

(2) They will be disposed to do it. They will not be unmindful of the favors conferred upon them; it will be a characteristic of them that they "will" be thankful.

"The upright shall dwell in thy presence": They shall be under thy protection. They shall be admitted to thy favor; they shall dwell in thy dwelling-place.

(1) On earth they shall enjoy his favor, "as if" they abode with God.

(2) In heaven they will be permitted to dwell with him forever.

The general idea of the psalm is, that the poor, the persecuted, the afflicted, if righteous, shall enjoy the favor and protection of God. God is on their side, and not on the side of the wicked who oppress them. But then, people "should be righteous" in order that they may find the favor of God and dwell with him. There is no reason why a "poor" wicked man should enjoy the favor of God any more than why a "rich" wicked man should. It is not poverty or riches that commend us to God. It is faith, and holiness, and love, and obedience, in the condition of life in which we are placed. Be it in a cottage or a palace.

In the last verse, we saw an assurance of all the wonderful care and protection God shows. Now in this verse we see the statement that surely we would praise Him for it. Those who have been put in right standing with God, (the righteous), should praise the Lord for the free gift of salvation. We know that there will come a time when the upright shall dwell in heaven near the throne of God with Jesus. This is saying, that even now, we can be in the presence of God. We read in these lessons that He is omnipresent. Even though He is heaven on the throne, He is right here with us as well. The upright, not only feel His presence once in a while, but we are surrounded by His presence all the time. His name is above all names. We can do no less than to thank Him with everything within us.

Psalm 140 Questions

1. Deliver me from the _____.
2. Who is the violent man of verse 1, probably?
3. Where do these mischievous imaginings come from?
4. They are continually gathered together for _____.
5. They have sharpened their tongue like a _____.
6. What is under their tongue?
7. An evil tongue breaks not only bones, but can break your _____.
8. We all need to _____ our tongue.
9. Keep me, O Lord, from the _____ of the wicked.

10. Who could better tell us of how bad it is to be in the hands of the wicked?
11. What did these wicked men have on their mind night and day?
12. What is gins in verse 5?
13. There was never a question in David's mind about what?
14. Who is the strength of His salvation?
15. What had God done for David in battle?
16. What lesson can we learn from David fighting in the name of the Most High God?
17. Grant not the desires of the _____.
18. Why would the wicked have to exalt themselves?
19. In verse 9, David says to let what cover them?
20. In what chapter of Proverbs do we read about the coals of fire on the head of the wicked?
21. Let not an _____ be established in the earth.
22. The violent planted what kind of seed?
23. What will they produce?
24. Who will maintain the cause of the afflicted?
25. Surely the righteous shall give _____ unto thy name.