

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
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Psalm 140 — Vindication and Vengeance Regarding the Vile and Violent

1.0 Introducing Psalm 140

- Psalms 140–143 are tied together because they reveal the same author (David), similar circumstances (times of trouble), the same tone (personal lament), and use words occurring only in these psalms (e.g., “viper,” v. 3).
- The setting for this group of psalms could be either the time of Saul’s pursuit of David or the rebellion of Absalom (the better option; 2 Sam 15–18).
- The troubles that call forth references to “my enemies” (Ps 138:7) and “Your enemies” (139:20) continue in Psalm 140.
- Adversity in David’s life kept him close to God. David strayed from God when he was living in comfort and removed from adversity.

2.0 Reading Psalm 140 (NAU)

140:1 A Psalm of David.

Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men;
Preserve me from violent men

140:2 Who devise evil things in *their* hearts;
They continually stir up wars.

140:3 They sharpen their tongues as a serpent;
Poison of a viper is under their lips.

Selah.

140:4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
Preserve me from violent men
Who have purposed to trip up my feet.

140:5 The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords;
They have spread a net by the wayside;
They have set snares for me.

Selah.

140:6 I said to the LORD, “You are my God;

- Give ear, O LORD, to the voice of my supplications.
- 140:7** “O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation,
You have covered my head in the day of battle.
- 140:8** “Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked;
Do not promote his *evil* device, *that* they *not* be exalted. **Selah.**
- 140:9** “As for the head of those who surround me,
May the mischief of their lips cover them.
- 140:10** “May burning coals fall upon them;
May they be cast into the fire,
Into deep pits from which they cannot rise.
- 140:11** “May a slanderer not be established in the earth;
May evil hunt the **violent** man speedily.”
- 140:12** I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted
And justice for the poor.
- 140:13** Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name;
The upright will dwell in Your presence.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 140

3.1 Outline

- I. Prayer for Rescue and Preservation (vv. 1–5)
 - A. From Evil Hearts and Tongues (vv. 1–3)
 - B. From Wicked Hands and Traps (vv. 4–5)
- II. Prayer for Protection and Retribution (vv. 6–11)
 - A. For the Benefactor’s Grace (vv. 6–8)
 - B. For Boomerang Justice (vv. 9–11)
- III. Proclamation of Trust and Thanks (vv. 12–13)



3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1–11** Repeated Order of Elements
 - Verses 6–11 repeat verses 1–5 (adapted from Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001], 330):
 - A: stir up wars (v. 2)
 - B: their lips (v. 3)
 - C: trip my feet (v. 4)
 - D: trap . . . net . . . snares (v. 5)
 - A': day of battle (v. 7)
 - B': their lips (v. 9)
 - C': cast . . . into deep pits (v. 10)
 - D': hunt (v. 11)
- **vv. 1–8** David makes seven pleas to the Lord in this section.
 - [1] “Rescue me” (v. 1), [2] “Preserve me” (v. 1), [3] “Keep me” (v. 4), [4] “Preserve me” (v. 4), [5] “Give ear” (v. 6), [6] “Do not grant” (v.8), [7] “Do not promote” (v. 8).
 - David met his problems with prayer to his Protector.

■ *How do you handle your problems?*

• vv. 1–5 Parallel Structure

■ Note the following parallels between verses 1–3 and verses 4–5:

1–3 Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men;
Preserve me from violent men

Who *devise* evil
stir up wars.
tongues . . . lips
Selah.

4–5 Keep me, O LORD, from the wicked;
Preserve me from violent men

Who *purposed*
hidden a trap
spread a net
set snares.
Selah.

• v. 1 “violent men”

■ For example, Doeg (see 1 Sam 21–22). Compare Psalms 54:3; 86:14.

■ “Violent” occurs three times in the psalm (vv. 1, 4, 11). “It can denote general lawlessness or outrage (e.g., Gen. 6:11, 13), but the references in the Psalms all make sense taken as denoting violence that is lawless and outrageous, often because it is exercised by means of the law (55:9 [10]; 58:2 [3]; 72:14; 73:6; 74:20).” — John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3, Psalms 90–150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 644.

■ “Evil men” and “violent men” are the central elements in the chiasmic arrangement of this verse. In verse 4 “hands of the wicked” and “violent men” are the central elements. The repeated focus is emphatic.

■ Clearly we live in a vicious and violent world filled with vile people.

■ Rather than complaining about troubles, we should praise God for allowing us to rely more on Him.

• v. 3 “Poison of a viper is under their lips”



■ The word for “viper” occurs only here and came to mean “spider” in later Hebrew. The parallel with “serpent” and the words with “s” sounds imitating the serpent’s hissing sound both argue for “viper.”

✓ Most scholars consider the poisonous horned viper or adder to be the best identification here.

■ Compare Deuteronomy 32:31–33.

■ Paul cites this phrase in Romans 3:13 because he is echoing the teaching of Scripture as a whole regarding the depravity of mankind, which reveals itself in sinful speech.

• vv. 3, 5, 8 “Selah.”

■ For this word, see notes on Psalms 3 and 67.

- All three occurrences follow references to the wicked and come at subdivisions of the psalm.
- See Psalm 143:6, which completes the only four uses of “Selah” in Book 5 of the Psalter. This is the first use of “Selah” since 89:48.
- **v. 6** “You are my God”
 - David expresses a personal relationship to God.
 - Note the various titles for deity he employs: “LORD” (Yahweh: vv. 1, 4, 6, 8, 12), “my God” (El: v. 6), and “GOD the Lord” (Yahweh Adonai: v. 7).
 - *How can we build this kind of personal relationship with God?*
- **v. 6** “my supplications”
 - The Hebrew word comes from the root word for “grace.” These prayers are pleas for divine grace (unmerited favor).
- **v. 7** “GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation”
 - Here, “the Lord” should be “my Lord.” Thus revealing a double emphasis on the personal relationship David has with his God.
 - The Lord established the personal relationship by delivering David and protecting him.
 - While “strength” and “salvation” may occur together (e.g., Exod 15:2; Pss 37:39; 62:7; 118:14; Isa 12:2; 33:2), only here in the Bible does the phrase “the strength of my salvation” appear.
 - *How is the Lord the strength of your salvation?*
- **v. 7** “in the day of battle”
 - “Battle” is literally “equipment,” “armor,” or “weapons.” “The day of weapons” refers to the battle or warfare itself.
 - ✓ See 2 Kings 10:2; Isaiah 22:8; Job 20:24; and 39:21.
- **vv. 9–11** Prayer for Boomerang Justice
 - See notes on Psalm 64:7–9.
 - See <http://www.drbarrick.org/MyBlog.html#boomerang>.
- **vv. 12–13** Proclamation of Trust and Thanks
 - “The king’s duty to his people in this sphere was a constant reminder that God as King will take this matter no less seriously.” — Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 469.
- **v. 13** “Surely”
 - The final verse is introduced by an emphatic particle expressing David’s certainty.

4.0 Singing Psalm 140

“Lord, Save Me from the Evil Man”

(Tune: “Amazing Grace”)



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|---|---|
| <p>1 Lord, save me from the evil man,
and from his pride and spite,
And from all those also who do
in violence delight:</p> <p>3 Keep me, O Lord, from wicked hands,
preserve me to abide
Free from the cruel man that means
to cause my steps to slide.</p> <p>5 Therefore I said unto the Lord,
Thou art my God alone,
Hear me therefore, O hear the voice
wherewith I pray and moan.</p> <p>7 Let not, O Lord, the wicked have
the end of his desire,
Perform not his ill thought, lest he
with pride be set on fire.</p> <p>9 Let coals fall on them, let them be
cast in consuming flame,
And in deep pit, that never they
may rise out of the same.</p> <p>11 I know the Lord th’ afflicted will
revenge, and judge the poor:
The just shall praise Thy Name, and shall
dwell with Thee evermore.</p> | <p>2 Who evermore on me make war,
their tongues, lo, they have whet
Like serpents; underneath their lips
is adders’ poison set.</p> <p>4 The proud have laid a snare for me,
and they have spread a net
With cords in my pathway, and snares
for me also have set.</p> <p>6 O Lord my God, Thou only art
the strength that saveth me;
My head in day of battle hath
been covered still by Thee.</p> <p>8 Of them that compass me about,
the chiefest of them all,
Lord, let the mischief of their lips
upon their own heads fall;</p> <p>10 For no backbiters shall on earth
be set in stable plight;
And evil to destruction still
shall hunt the cruel wight.</p> |
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- Words: Thomas Sternhold,
John Hopkins et al.,
The Whole Book of Psalms (1812)

5.0 Praying Psalm 140

- Protect me, Lord, from those who would harm me. [v. 1]
- Provide me with Your grace—You are my God. [v. 6]
- Father, prevent the wicked from being exalted. [v. 8]
- Lord, let me dwell in Your presence. [v. 13]



6.0 Applying Psalm 140

- Evil hearts produce evil words. Cp. Matthew 15:18.
- God rescues, preserves, listens to our prayers, and provides justice.
- God’s deeds on our behalf produce confidence in Him.

So what do we do when we are surrounded by “people of the lie,” above all when we find so much of their terrible evil in ourselves? The answer is to do what David did. We turn to God as the only one who can deliver us both from others and ourselves; we place our needs before him; and then we praise him for the deliverance he gives.

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.
(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1218