

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

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
Placerita Baptist Church
2009

by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 141 — Lord, Preserve Me from All Evil

1.0 Introducing Psalm 141

- See introduction to Psalms 140 for the relationship between Psalms 140–143 and their potential setting.
- Because of verse 2, Psalm 141 is thought to have been composed as an evening prayer. Other such psalms include Psalms 4 (see vv. 4, 8) and 63 (see v. 6).
- David prays every word, every phrase of this psalm. Above all else, it is a psalm that reminds us of the nature, content, and importance of prayer.

2.0 Reading Psalm 141 (NAU)

141:1 A Psalm of David.

O LORD, I call upon You; hasten to me!
Give ear to **my voice** when I call to You!

141:2 May my prayer be counted as incense before You;
The lifting up of **my hands** as the evening offering.

141:3 Set a guard, O LORD, over **my mouth**;
Keep watch over the door of **my lips**.

141:4 Do not incline **my heart** to any evil thing,
To practice deeds of wickedness
With men who do iniquity;

And do not let me eat of their delicacies.

141:5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me;
It is oil upon the head;
Do not let **my head** refuse it,
For still **my prayer** is against their wicked deeds.

141:6 Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the rock,
And they hear **my words**, for they are pleasant.

- 141:7** As when one plows and breaks open the earth,
Our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol.
- 141:8** For **my eyes** are toward You, O GOD, the Lord;
In You I take refuge; do not leave me defenseless.
- 141:9** Keep me from the jaws of the trap which they have set for me,
And from the snares of those who do iniquity.
- 141:10** Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
While I pass by safely.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 141

3.1 Outline

- I. Praying with Urgency (vv. 1–2)
- II. Praying for Deliverance from Temptation (vv. 3–5)
- III. Praying for Justice and Vindication (vv. 6–7)
- IV. Praying for Preservation (vv. 8–10)



3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1–2** Praying about Prayer
 - Compare Psalm 140:6.
- **v. 2** “as incense before You”
 - Incense represents the prayers of believers (Rev 5:8). Therefore, *what lesson for prayer can we draw from each of the following biblical truths about incense?*
 - ✓ Offering incense is one of the three primary tasks of a priest (Deut 33:10).
 - ✓ God will not accept incense offerings from those who are involved in iniquity (Isa 1:13).
 - ✓ Incense was a special mixture of spices that set it apart from any other usage (Exod 30:37).
 - ✓ The high priest offered incense both morning and evening when he trimmed the lamps of the menorah (Exod 30:7–8).
 - ✓ A cloud of incense protected the high priest as he entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12–13).
- **v. 2** “as the evening offering”
 - Starting on the day of his anointing, the high priest regularly presented a grain offering both morning and evening (Lev 6:20).
 - David appointed Zadok and his descendants to offer the regular morning and evening burnt offerings (1 Chron 16:39–40).
 - At the time of the evening offering, Elijah prayed to God on Mt. Carmel when he confronted the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:36).
 - Daniel was confessing the sins of his people and praying when the angel Gabriel came to him with an answer to his prayer (Dan 9:4–23).
 - Ezra grieved over the sins of the people, prayed to God, and worshiped at the time of the evening sacrifice (Ezra 9:4–5).



- **v. 3** “Set a guard . . . over my mouth”
 - People face their greatest challenge in controlling their speech.
 - ✓ See Exodus 23:13; Psalms 34:13; 39:1; Proverbs 8:13; Luke 6:45; James 3:1–12.
 - *What can you do to guard your mouth?*
- **v. 4** “Do not incline my heart”
 - “What a busy workshop is the heart of man, and what a host of devices is there manufactured every moment! If God do not watch over our heart and tongue, there will confessedly be no bounds to words and thoughts of a sinful kind,—so rare a gift of the Spirit is moderation in language, while Satan is ever making suggestions which will be readily and easily complied with, unless God prevent.” — John Calvin, *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 357.
 - Compare “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:13).
 - ✓ See 1 Kings 8:58 (Solomon’s concluding benediction after his prayer dedicating the Temple); 11:1–2 (“turn your heart” = “incline your heart”); Psalm 119:36; Proverbs 2:2; 4:23–27 (v. 27, “Do not turn” = “Do not incline”).
- **v. 4** “do not let me eat of their delicacies”
 - “Delicacies” occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible.
 - It seems that David, in his time of trial (perhaps living in Ammon during Absalom’s rebellion), becomes tempted by the luxuries of his pagan hosts. Compare Psalm 73:12–17.
 - “The antidote to temptation lies in prayer (v. 2), in inner purity (v. 4), in the strong support of good friends (v. 5), and in taking constant refuge in God (v. 8).” — James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 674.
- **vv. 5–7** Variations in Translations
 - “Thus far the Psalm is comparatively easy of exposition; but now it becomes difficult, yet not hopelessly so.” — Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans. by Francis Bolton, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1968), 3:364.

^{NAU 5} Let the righteous smite me in kindness

^{NKJ 5} Let the righteous strike me; *It shall be* a kindness.

^{NIV 5} Let a righteous man strike me — it is a kindness

^{ESV 5} Let a righteous man strike me — it is a kindness

^{JPS 5} Let the righteous smite me in kindness

^{NET 5} May the godly strike me in love

NAU⁵ It is oil upon the head
NKJ⁵ *It shall be* as excellent oil
NIV⁵ it is oil on my head
ESV⁵ it is oil for my head
JPS⁵ oil so choice
NET⁵ choice oil!

NAU⁶ Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the rock
NKJ⁶ Their judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff
NIV⁶ their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs
ESV⁶ When their judges are thrown over the cliff
JPS⁶ Their judges are thrown down by the sides of the rock
NET⁶ They will be thrown down the side of a cliff by their judges

- **v. 5** “Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me”
 - “It might be translated, ‘May the righteous strike me in steadfast love and correct me,’ that is, ‘May those who are truly committed to the LORD show their loyalty by pointing out to me the error of my ways and by redirecting my steps.’” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 455.
 - See Proverbs 27:6.
- **v. 6** “thrown down by the sides of the rock”
 - This is a reference to the just end of those who do wickedness.
 - Compare 2 Chronicles 25:12.
- **v. 7** “Our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol”
 - Reference to the wicked or to David and his fellow believers?
 - Compare Psalm 44:22.
 - Delitzsch took this (together with the preceding line) as a reference to the future bodily resurrection of the righteous: “it would nevertheless be only as when one in ploughing cleaves the earth; *i.e.* they do not lie there in order that they may continue lying, but that they may rise up anew, as the seed that is sown sprouts up out of the upturned earth.” — *Psalms*, 3:366.
- **v. 8** “my eyes are toward You”
 - Our focus should be on God at all times—both during worship and after we leave worship to serve Him in the world.
 - To safely cross the high wire, a performer keeps his eyes on the goal.
 - See Hebrews 12:2.
- **v. 8** “O GOD the Lord” — Compare Psalm 140:7.
- **vv. 9–10** “trap . . . snares . . . nets” — Boomerang Justice.
Compare Psalm 140:5.

4.0 Singing Psalm 141

“Lord, in Thy Sight, O Let My Prayer”

(Tune: “Lord, Lay Some Soul Upon My Heart”)



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|---|--|
| <p>1 Lord, in Thy sight, O let my prayer
Like morning incense rise;
My lifted hands accepted be
An evening sacrifice.</p> | <p>2 From hasty language curb my tongue,
And let a constant guard
Still keep the portal of my lips
With wary silence barred.</p> |
| <p>3 From wicked men’s designs and deeds
My heart and hands restrain;
Nor let me share their evil works,
Or their unrighteous gain.</p> | <p>4 Let upright men reprove my faults,
And I shall think them kind;
Like healing oil upon my head
I their reproof shall find.</p> |

— Words: Paraphrase of Psalm 141;
author unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 141

- Please answer my prayer quickly, Father. [v. 1]
- Control my sinful mouth, Lord. [v. 3]
- Do not allow me to be tempted. [v. 4]
- Father, send godly friends to reprove me and correct me. [v. 5]
- O God, make me speak words that will have an impact on others. [v. 6]

6.0 Applying Psalm 141

- Our first response in a time of need should be prayer.
- The lips that pray to God should not be used for impure speech.
- The way the heart bends sets our life’s trends.
- Keep your eyes focused on God.

Why don’t we pray more? Why do we too often find prayer boring? There are a number of reasons why:

1. *God’s thoughts are not our thoughts.* Prayer is talking to God and God is not like us (Isa 55:8–9).
2. *We do not know the Bible.* Our ignorance of God is traceable to our ignorance of the Bible. . . . The best prayer always goes together with the best Bible study.
3. *We do not feel in need of God’s help.* Having said all the above, however, I sense that the main reason why we have so much trouble praying and do not pray is that we do not feel we need God’s help.

— Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.
(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1222–23