

# Antidote to Viper Poison

**Psalm 140:1** *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.*

Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men,  
<sup>2</sup> who plan evil things in their heart and stir up wars continually.

<sup>3</sup> They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps [or viper]. **Selah**

<sup>4</sup> Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from violent men, who have planned to trip up my feet.

<sup>5</sup> The arrogant have hidden a trap for me, and with cords they have spread a net; beside the way they have set snares for me. **Selah**

<sup>6</sup> I say to the LORD, You are my God; give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O LORD!

<sup>7</sup> O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle.

<sup>8</sup> Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted! **Selah**

<sup>9</sup> As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!

<sup>10</sup> Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise!

<sup>11</sup> Let not the slanderer be established in the land; let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!

<sup>12</sup> I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.

<sup>13</sup> Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name; the upright shall dwell in your presence."

**Psalm 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!

<sup>2</sup> Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

<sup>3</sup> Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

<sup>4</sup> Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!

<sup>5</sup> Let a righteous man strike me-- it is a kindness; let him rebuke me-- it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.

<sup>6</sup> When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant.

<sup>7</sup> As when one plows and breaks up the earth, so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

<sup>8</sup> But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless!

<sup>9</sup> Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers!

<sup>10</sup> Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely."

Psalms 140-141

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## Vipers

THERE ARE ABOUT 3,400 species of snake in the world. Considering that one estimate puts the number of species of animals on earth at around 8.7 million, that's not a whole lot

per capita. But if your name is Indiana, then even one species of snake is one too many. I suppose many women agree with Indiana Jones, though of course not all of them do, and that's actually kind of important. It is interesting that at the curse God told [Eve](#) that there would be enmity between her seed and the seed of the serpent. Since there doesn't seem to be an all-out war between snakes and people nor universal hatred of snakes especially by women, maybe that passage means something different than a so-called "literal" interpretation would lead one to believe.

Of those 3,400 species of snake, about [600 of them are poisonous](#) to humans, so a little less than one in five. Of these, among the more deadly are certain kinds of [vipers](#). [Russell's viper](#) and the [saw-scaled viper](#) are two of the "Big Four" venomous snakes species that are responsible by far and away for most human deaths caused from snakes. The former is "[excruciatingly painful](#)," causing internal bleeding, bruising, blistering, and necrosis. The snake is "[irritable, short-tempered, and a very aggressive snake by nature](#)." The latter is unpredictable, aggressive, and is "[one of the fastest striking snakes in the world](#)." Together, in India alone, they are responsible for 30,000 deaths a year. The latter has such

a wide range it is believed to cause more deaths than any other snake species.<sup>1</sup>

While fairly ordinary looking, some vipers such as the [eyelash viper](#) and the Sri Lankan pit viper are mesmerizing in beauty. The pit viper can be green or blue, while the eyelash is found in yellow or orange or green. They are quite something to see. But, don't let their appearances fool you. Their bite is venomous and painful. They are, after all, still vipers!



Biblically speaking, vipers are used in several ways. They represent the [beautiful, but crafty](#); the [dangerous and](#)

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<sup>1</sup> See “List of dangerous snakes,” Wiki. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_dangerous\\_snakes#Russell's\\_viper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dangerous_snakes#Russell's_viper).

deadly; and they are a picture of supernatural evil.<sup>2</sup> This supernatural evil has two layers. The first attaches itself to the Nachash, the creature in the Garden that tempted Eve. It isn't that he was a snake or was somehow possessing a snake. It is that Satan is represented by the images of craftiness, venom, and death with the snake. And if Jews and other early peoples around the world are to be believed, he (and other Watchers) may also have resembled a snake in some way. Second, while this supernatural serpentine evil remains a very real and present danger *outside* of people due to temptations, through the first sin of Adam, it also takes root *on the inside*.

One of the greatest problems today is that very few people, even Christians, take this seriously. But the Apostle, in his great critique of human nature in **Romans 1:18-3:20** reaches a climactic note when he **condemns all humanity**—Jew and Gentile, male and female, young and old, without distinction or exception this way: “**None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one**

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<sup>2</sup> See Leland Ryken et al., “Serpent,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 773–774.

does good, not even one. Their throats is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps/vipers is under their lips...” (Rom 3:10-13).

This entire series of rebukes is taken from various places in the Old Testament. Paul made none of it up. Many of them come from the Psalms, including the last one, which is taken from the first of our two Psalms today. Psalm 140:3, “They make their tongue sharp as a serpent’s, and under their lips is the venom of asps/vipers. *Selah*.” What we are going to look at today is both the immediate context of this in the songs, as well as the general principle of this viper’s poison and whether or not there is an antidote. In days such as these, it is difficult to know if there is a more subject. For ours is a culture (church included) in steep decline which is heading quickly towards the point of no return, due in no small part, to the near total denial of these things.

## Psalms 140-141

Psalms 140-141, as well as 142-143, move us into the center of our last set of songs of David. Both are titled “A Psalm of David,” while the first adds, “To the Choirmaster”

(“*For the End*”). These songs are attached to each other thematically. 140 seems to build on 139s ending of where wicked men, men of blood, malicious enemies who hate God and take his name in vain have arisen (Ps 139:19-21). Psalms 140-143 then seem to depict some kind of violence (140) turned to execution (141) turned to imprisonment (142) turned to panic (143).<sup>3</sup> Psalm 144-145 then move us to a court scene with David against his foes (144) with a glorious hymn of praise to God who has answered him in his trouble (145). We then end with five songs of hallelujah to finish out the Psalter (146-150). Clearly, as Goulder says, whoever placed these songs in this order at this point in the book saw them as a series.<sup>4</sup>

I’m preaching Psalms 140-141 together for several reasons. First, Psalm 141 seems to be an evening psalm (“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” Ps 141:2). In fact, 139, 141, 143, and 145 are probably all evening psalms,<sup>5</sup> which seems to fit our pattern throughout Book V of the placement of songs as morning and evening together for the sake

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<sup>3</sup> This line is in Goulder, 271.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Goulder, 283.

of celebrating the week-long festivals of Israel after they returned home from the exile. A morning-evening duo works well to help us see things we might not otherwise see.

**Second**, while each song stands alone in terms of its own structure, it is possible to **see the two of them together as forming a single chiasm**. By itself, Psalm 140 can be divided into basic parts according to the *Selahs*:

1. vv. 1-3 (*Selah*) – Prayer for Deliverance
2. vv. 4-5 (*Selah*) – Prayer for Protection
3. vv. 6-8 (*Selah*) – Prayer to be Heard
4. vv. 9-11 - Prayer for Enemy to be Destroyed
5. vv. 12-13 – Confidence for the Afflicted and Righteous

Psalm 141 has an even simpler structure:

1. vv. 1-5a - Prayer for Deliverance from Sin and Temptation
2. vv. 5b-10 - Prayer for the Downfall of and Deliverance from the Wicked

And yet, as you can see, the themes of both are about deliverance and the wicked. So, these can be combined to form a kind of chiasm that includes both songs, which means they

are meant to be read together (as “morning” and “evening” songs should be):

- A) Psa 140:1-13, Deliver me from the snares of evil men
- B) Psa 141:1, Lord, I cry out to You; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You
- C) Psa 141:2-4, Prayer / over my mouth / do not delight in anything evil
- D) central axis) Psa 141:5, Let the righteous correct me + let me not refuse it**
- C`) Psa 141:5c-6, Prayer / over my words / the authentic delight of truth
- B`) Psa 141:8, But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord; in You I take refuge; do not leave my soul destitute
- A`) Psa 141:9-10, Keep me from the snares evil men have laid for me<sup>6</sup>

**Third**, these two songs work well to help you see a problem and a solution to that problem from a biblical point of view. That’s the main point I hope to help you see during our time in these two songs.

## **Psalm 140: The Serpents and Their Venom**

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<sup>6</sup> Christine Miller, Chiasm of Psalms 140-141.

Psalm 140 opens with a lengthy prayer. This prayer is broken up by three *Selahs* (“Pause to Think”). The first is a petition for deliverance that comes in the form of a lament. “Deliver me, O LORD...” (Ps 140:1a). This is common throughout the Psalms. In fact, with this opening and the closing of Psalm 150, some have argued that these ending songs of the Psalter mirror the pattern of the structure of the book as a whole as it moves from lamentation to praise.<sup>7</sup> God desires our prayers, including lamentations when we are up to our necks. It is only the prideful person who refuses to take such situations to the LORD, somehow thinking God either doesn’t care or won’t listen or that we’ve got it all under control down here. Prayers of this sort force you to become more dependent upon the LORD who holds all things in his hands.

Who does he need deliverance from? “... from evil men; preserve me from violent men” (Ps 140:1b). Violence is one particular form of evil (which takes many forms). Generally speaking, this could include any kind of a violent person. However, here it seems to be talking about powerful men

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<sup>7</sup> Mark D. Futato, *The Book of Psalms*, Tyndale Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2009), 417.

who serve in politics. Why do I say that? Because they “Plan evil things in their heart and stir up wars continually” (vs. 2). Your run-of-the-mill violent man can’t do a lot of stirring up of wars. But rich, powerful politicians sure can. Speaking later about vs. 9 and the “head” of those who surround me, Matthew Poole writes, “By which he understands ... Their politic heads, their chiefs or ringleaders, who were most malicious, and by whom all the rest were supported and stirred up.”<sup>8</sup> Goulder summarizes in a way that is as relevant as it ever has been,

In other words they do not like the psalmist and his policies, and have sensibly been taking counsel together to resist him. Thus far the situation might be compared to a normal election in a modern democracy; one party leader might feel the same about the other’s staff—indeed, some of the latter’s more religious supporters might well be using Psalm 140 at their daily Prayer Meetings.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 205.

<sup>9</sup> Goulder, 250.

He wrote that twenty years ago. Do we really even need to talk about applications today in a climate I've not seen as ready to blow up into full scaled civil war as what we are living through right now? The viciousness, the calculated, publicly drummed up calls for violence against members of opposite parties by other members of congress? We are living in frightening times. And, of course, so was **David whose days were much worse** than ours are at the present moment. As we've seen throughout the Psalter the political intrigues he had to escape from time and again by men, friends and enemies, who were literally seeking to take his life.

**Vs. 3** brings us our *serpentine language*. Note well where such violence begins: “**They make their tongue sharp as a serpent’s...**” (**Ps 140:3a**). Snakes have forked tongues, not the round things you and I have. But the language here suggests that they literally make their tongues like this on purpose. Like sharpening a sword with a rock, each back and forth motion takes off a little of the steel, while making it deadly sharp even to the touch, each time they speak, they hone the edge of their tongue so that it can strike with its deadly poison. Insanely, there are people who are literally doing body augmentations to make themselves permanently

resemble snakes. This includes slicing the tongue in the middle in order to create two tips: a forked tongue. What makes a person literally want to look less human and more like, well, the devil?

But as mad as that is, it is but a physical representation of the evil that lurks near in spiritual places. The second half of the verse says, “under their lips is the venom of asps (or vipers, NAS)” (Ps 140:3b). There are so many verses on the danger of the tongue. “A perverse (tongue) breaks the spirit” (Prov 15:4). “Rash words are like sword thrusts” (Prov 12:18). “The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness” (James 3:5). “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit” (1Pe 3:10). These are but the tip of a great iceberg. These days, we have to include in “the tongue” the “fingers” that type so quickly in public internet forums!

But it’s the imagery that is so stunning, and it was the purpose of the introduction to help you think of it. These wicked men are serpentine in the deadly poison as they strike with such cunning and swiftness against, as David says at the end, the afflicted and the righteous and upright. Like

some of those snakes, they can take on truly beautiful outward appearance. This is part of their seduction. That beautiful person wouldn't do that to me? But the evil he describes is a deadly toxin capable of toppling not just men, but nations. We are seeing the power of destructive words from the highest levels in the offices of a nation now lost in a morass of incivility.

And the people seem to care very little these days for the words of leaders “on their side.” Thus, public rants of our politicians who are escalating the rhetoric of violence against fellow citizens and enemies of their own political party are being not just tolerated, but paraded if they come from the “good side,” while hypocritically attacked if the “enemy” dares step out of line. This national hypocrisy increasingly is molding each one of us into hissing serpent in our own everyday lives as we interact with our spouses, children, employees, and neighbors in ways that emulate our leadership. More than ever, we have to watch our tongues, especially as Christians as Peter said. This behavior does not lead to righteousness and long life. *Selah.*

The **second** part of the **prayer is for protection.** “**Guard me, O LORD...**” (Ps 140:4). God is the rock and refuge,

safe-place in times of disaster. He protects through storms and winds that buffets all around us. For he is unmovable and unshakable, and when we take refuge in him, we find true and lasting protection from any evil that slithers in the grass.

In this case it is “the hands of the wicked; preserve me from violent men, who have planned to trip up my feet” (4). The repetition of “violent men” now moves from the tongue with which they plan to the hands with which they attack. They are going after his feet, which means they mean to make him fall. And when he has fallen, he cannot run away or escape. He is easy prey, as this is a tactic that lions and other big cats to catch and eat their prey.

“The arrogant have hidden a trap for me, and with cords they have spread a net; beside the way they have set snares for me” (5). What are hidden things? What are traps? What are snares? They are things you can't see until it's too late. They are great clamping iron jaws of death that snap and break the leg; huge holes in the ground covered with weak little sticks to conceal the danger; giant nets camouflaged on the ground connected to ropes that hurdle the person into the air helpless when they walk into it. All I want to focus

on here is that **they are hidden**. I will pause for a moment to let you consider this, and **then we will look at how Psalm 141 helps us answer this question** of where and what they are. *Selah*.

With this prayer for deliverance and protection from the evils that come from politicians hell-bent on destruction now behind him, **David prays to be heard**. “**I say to the LORD, ‘You are my God; give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O LORD’**” (6). “**Give ear.**” Hear me. *Lord, you can hear because you are all knowing* (as we saw in Psalm 139). David can’t escape from God anywhere; therefore, God hears. He needs mercy, and so he calls upon the God of mercy—his God, the only God who is merciful—to answer him.

“**O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle**” (7). This is an obvious **reference to Christ** in the OT. First, because his familiar Yahweh and Adonai theme from Psalm 110:1 is found. “**Yahweh says to my Lord (Adonai): Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool**” (**Ps 110:1**). The NT repeatedly tells us that “**my Adonai**” is **Christ**. And so it is “**My Adonai**” here as well. Second, because it is the

job of the Commander of the Hosts, the Captain whom Joshua worshiped, to go into battle. Battle is the theme of this verse. And now, this Captain is covering David's head, by protecting him for the coming assault. (Note here, as opposed to Psalm 110:1 is that here Adonai *is* Yahweh, whereas in Psalm 110 the two are separate. How? Because the Father and the Son are not each other; but they are both God).

“Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted! *Selah*” (Ps 140:8). To be heard, David needs God to stop their plots and cause them to be frustrated. The reason? Only God can be glorified; not wicked men. In stopping them, God *will be* glorified, and they *will come* to an end. The glory of God thus ends the third and final. To who alone the glory? *Selah*.

At this point, the prayer takes this “ending of their plots” and makes it specific. It is a call for the destruction of these wicked men. “As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!” (9). We've already seen Matthew Poole tell us about this. “Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise!” (10).

Goulder suggests that the situation here is something like the 60s when Presidents and activists were being murdered as opposed to the “gentlemanly 1996 elections.” But like the 60s, times they are a changing again. And unlike 1996, our days seem like we might actually see one or the other party publicly call for this kind of thing to happen to the other in a public forum—be it in a press conference or a rally on a street.

But again, as in all Psalm imprecations, it is vital to see what David is doing. Michael Fallon is a Roman Catholic missionary who wrote on this in fairly common divorce-Jesus-from-the-OT fashion, “Verses 9-11 are not consistent with Jesus’ response to the suffering inflicted on him, or of the response he asks from his disciples. We can pray verses 12-13.”<sup>10</sup> But this betrays a fundamental misreading of the text!

Rather than inciting sheeple in streets to carry out revenge by saying, “God is on our side” so “Let’s show up wherever we have to show up. If you see anybody in that cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Fallon, “15. Psalms 140-143: Praying Psalm 140 with Jesus,” *Michael Fallon msc*, [http://mbfallon.com/psalms\\_101-150\\_retreat\\_pdf/15\\_psalms\\_140-143.pdf](http://mbfallon.com/psalms_101-150_retreat_pdf/15_psalms_140-143.pdf).

station, you get out and you create a crowd, and you push back on them, and you tell them their not welcome anymore, anywhere,” David goes into his room and prays *for God* to cause burning coals to fall upon them, for God to let their own words come back on them. **Now why in the world can't a Christian pray for that?**

There is nothing contradictory here between this and the admonition, “**If your enemy is hungry, feed him; is he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head**” (**Rom 12:20**). It is not impossible to hate evil while loving those who are your enemies. It is not a bad thing to ask God to take vengeance through justice so that you don't have to. Indeed, the image of **vs. 10** seems to me very much one of hell, and it is God's job, not our job to put the wicked into that place. David isn't going to lift a finger, nor does he incite others to do the same.

This is a prayer of ultimate **confidence**. This is bold. Because this is faith that God will do what is right and that God will not tolerate the wicked forever. In the face of this, the song concludes, “**I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.**”

Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your Name; the upright shall swell in your presence” (12-13).

Again, the song ends with two words often associated with Christ: Name and Presence. Here, those who give thanks and dwell are the righteous and the upright. If tied together with vs. 12, they are also those who are afflicted by evil people, because they are righteous and because righteousness is hated in the world of men.

But it is just here that I believe looking at Psalm 141 can really help us. For who is righteous? That’s the question. Did we not read earlier the Apostle Paul talking about this? Let’s let David do some talking of his own.

## Psalm 141: The Antidote to the Poison

Psalm 141 begins with another prayer. It is even another prayer for deliverance. “O LORD, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you!” (Ps 141:1). “Set a guard ... Keep watch...” (3). “Do not let ... any evil” (4), etc. In this way it very much resembles the previous song. There is more resemblance in the language of “hands” (2), “mouth” and “lips” (3), “wicked deeds” and “men who

work iniquity” (4). There is even “a righteous man” (5). But with all these similarities, we see that the focus becomes very, very different.

I want you to think about Romans 3 again. Paul listed out several passages depicting human depravity that he said applied to every single person. One of those was from Psalm 140:3. Yet, we have seen the focus of that song be on someone other than David—David was thinking about truly wicked men. How is that about everyone? The answer is that Paul read all the psalms together. David now takes the same images that he used to depict others and applied them inward to himself.

You see, this is a prayer of deliverance to God *to save him from himself!* And thus, it is very fitting for this to be an evening worship song (as it has been throughout church history, and as it even teaches in vs. 2, “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!”).<sup>11</sup> Before you go to bed, you want to be introspective, humble, going to the LORD for forgiveness

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<sup>11</sup> In the fourth century, “Assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord’s house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath-day. And on the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day...”<sup>11</sup> (*Apostolic Constitutions* 2.59).

of your own sins you have committed that day, so that tomorrow you might be better equipped through the law and gospel to act more righteously. So, “Set a guard, O LORD, over MY mouth; keep watch over the door of MY lips!” (3). Let us not move quickly past this.

In the previous song it was the wicked who have such deadly poison dripping from their mouths. *They* are the vipers. And yet, here, the One After God’s Own Heart prays to the LORD for protection against *his own* mouth and lips. In other words, left to himself, David is “the wicked!” David is prone to striking back when cornered. David is a viper! This is why the Apostle could take the previous song and apply it not to just a few people, but to *all* people. For this is what David does! Beloved, let me tell you something. If David needs protection from this, you *know* that you do! And thus, with the deadly poison right here in our sight, we also have the **antidote given to us in a vial**. That vial is **vs. 3** and following.

You see, the key to fighting the poison is to apply the antidote to yourself. That antidote is the kindness and mercy of a forgiving God. But you don’t start with yourself by merely trying to become a better person through therapy.

No. You go before the Lord and you **admit your own innate sinfulness** and how easy it is for you to become “them.” You take your own wicked tongue and you lay it on the altar of prayer, offering it up to the Lord that he may redeem it by his grace. You start with yourself, not with other people. **The hidden trap here** is that you don’t see your own wicked heart and tongue lying in wait to strike at others, because you are blind to your own depravity and in love with your own serpentine appearance.

It isn’t that you don’t care about wickedness in other people; Psalm 140 taught you that already. But to fight evil, you have to go inside, for this is where the heart of the serpent begins. For we are all by nature born children of the devil, enslaved to our passions and to the prince of the power of the air and darkness, under God’s wrath. There is no one who is righteous, no one who does good, no not one. And only God through Christ who has conquered sin and the devil, and by his Holy Spirit who redeems you can you be set you free by the good news of his grace.

When you have leaders out there who can’t name a single time they have ever sinned or who have what seems to

be a good cause where they and those on their side are incapable themselves of committing acts of evil, then look out. But while you cannot control them, by God's grace you can take these words of life and apply them by running as fast as you can into your prayer closet where to confess your sins before God and beg his mercy and help—his salvation from yourself. Christians sin. But Christians are to be known for quickly seeking repentance.

David continues. “Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in the company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!” (4). He wouldn't need to pray this prayer if there was no real temptation for it to happen! The first half of this prayer is applicable to just about anyone. For we can all busy ourselves with wicked deeds. But how easy it is to do this in the company of men who work iniquity, to join them, like the mad mobs we see increasing in our day, mobs which are being incited by our own politicians who so wickedly spew venom and then reap their own personal political benefits by such compromises of morality. How many have become filthy rich by doing this? You are not to enjoy the fruit of

their wickedness by partaking with them in it. That is a banquet for vultures, not Christians.

David needs not just God's help here, but the help of others. So he prays to his God, “**Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it**” (Ps 141:5a). It is easy to think of David remembering some event like the prophet Nathan coming to him with harsh words of guilt and punishment. Yet, the king knew these words to be his very life, for through the kindness of another who would not let him stay in his sin (and think about how hard it would have been for someone to confront the king of a nation like this!), David's life was eventually preserved. His friend saved him from himself and it was the grace of God.

The prayer here is for power to **accept the rebuke** rather than to scoff at it or to create self-justifications or to mock or to strike back. This is the essence of godliness. It is the swallowing of the only bitter vial that contains the antidote to our own deadly poison. He won't stop praying against real evil in this world. He has just realized that he can't be a hypocrite about it. For **hypocrisy** is the very definition of hardened obstinate evil. And the only way he can't be a

hypocrite (because he will and did sin) is by having God search him out and see if there be any grievous way in him, so that God can lead him in the way everlasting. And that takes him right back to **Psalm 139** and that all-knowing God who is so unimaginably kind to him in Christ.

It is after David prays for these things that he then changes the subject to consider the evil of others again. Evil is still out there, not just inside. And he thinks about what is happening around him now. But the next few verses are confusing. It begins, “**Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds**” (5b).

Just here, the Hebrew is very difficult to translate.<sup>12</sup> The ESV has it read like David has changed subjects, back to his enemies. In a roundabout way this is true, yet the words used for “evil deeds” may not in fact be those of his enemies (like they were in the previous song). Rather, they may be the “calamities” (rather than “evil deeds” as the translation”) that befall those who have just, under great cost to themselves, rebuked him.

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<sup>12</sup> The *Handbook on the Psalms* says of vv. 5-7, “These verses are understood and translated in the most diverse ways possible. The Hebrew text as it now stands is quite obscure; there are many textual problems.” On 6b it says, “What this means in the context is impossible to determine.” Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyerburn, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 1143.

Though after David's time, think of something like when Jezebel slaughtered the prophets of Yahweh and only a few like Obadiah escaped (1Kg 18:4). In other words, it is speaking about what befalls the righteous, at the hands of the wicked, because they stand up for righteousness. If this is true, he is praying not against the wicked, but for his friend(s) who have stood by him, even when he was tempted to turn away from the LORD.

With this as the understanding, the ESV's "When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant..." (6) can be talking about when the truly wicked people throw the *righteous leaders* over a cliff in a form of stoning. They are murdered martyrs.<sup>13</sup> The political evil has taken to revolution. It is committing murder by throwing the righteous judges off of cliffs.

This then helps make sense of the last part of vs. 6 which says, "Then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant." Who shall hear? Not the wicked, but the surviving righteous. The pleasant words are not for the wicked. In this interpretation, David is praying for his fallen friends and those

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<sup>13</sup> This follows Goulder, 259-260.

who have survived the wrath of those who have unjustly persecuted them.

But whatever the meaning, note the use of words and **mouths** and **lips** again. These words are not being used to destroy, but to help; not to cause harm, but to bring comfort. David has taken the early part of the song and put into practice the very thing he prayed for. “**Lord, protect me from my evil mouth**” now becomes, “**I will use my mouth to benefit my brothers!**”

The image of being thrown over a cliff probably comes back into view in **vs. 7** when it talks about *bones scattered at the mouth of Sheol*. In Chronicles we read, “**The men of Judah captured another 10,000 alive and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces**” (**2Ch 25:12**). Notice that this is the result of politics and war. This was the punishment for blasphemy in the law (**Lev 24:16**). Stephen was charged with Blasphemy for telling the Jews that Christ was the son of God and for it he was stoned.

When **vs. 7** says, “**As when one plows and breaks up the earth, so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol,**” David is perhaps now identifying himself with his friends

who have been martyred. For he uses “our” bones. So, identifying himself now with the afflicted (remember [140:12](#)), David knows his only place to turn is back to the LORD.

“But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless” ([Ps 141:8](#)). Here we have David [turning back to Christ](#). “O GOD, my Lord” is the familiar Yahweh my Adonai—Christ. In [Deuteronomy 32:37](#), it is a mockery of the pagans “gods ... the rock in which they took refuge.” In Psalm 2, Moses Rock becomes the Son of God. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” In both places, the LXX translates “refuge” as “[trust](#).” In the NT, we put our trust in Christ ([Heb 2:12](#)). He is our defender, for he is the Captain of the Hosts ([Matt 26:53](#); [Rev 19:11](#); etc.).

He returns to the “trap” idea of the previous song. “Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers! Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely” ([Ps 141:9-10](#)). In this, he completes his prayer for protection and the downfall of the wicked. These are his words as he goes to sleep.

As I draw to a conclusion, given the political nature of these songs, their focus on evil, and it being July 4<sup>th</sup> week, my thoughts went to a speech given by one of our Presidents back on March 8, 1983 and the response the media had to it. In that speech, someone writes, “Ronald Reagan shocked sensibilities worldwide when he declared the USSR the ‘focus of evil in the modern world’; It was an ‘evil empire.’”<sup>14</sup> Reagan was torn apart for his language.

The New York Times described his comments as “sectarian,” “dangerous,” “outrageous,” “primitive,” and “simplistic theology,” concluding that “For a President to attack those who disagree with his politics as ungodly is terribly dangerous.” One historian said, “It was the worst presidential speech in American history, and I’ve read them all.” Why? Because of the “gross appeal to religious prejudice.”

Never mind that “the USSR was unspeakably oppressive, [an] atheistic regime that carried out a ‘wholesale war on religion,’ as Mikhail Gorbachev put it, [and] was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of its own people, at a rate and scale that made the Spanish Inquisition look mild.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul G. Kengor, “Vision & Values: Evil and George W. Bush,” Oct 1, 2004, The Center for Vision & Values, Grove City College, <http://www.visionandvalues.org/2004/10/vision-a-values-evil-and-george-w-bush/>.

(Vladimir Lenin killed more people in the first six months of the revolution than leaders of the Spanish Inquisition killed over six decades.) A complete catalogue of Kremlin crimes would fill libraries.”<sup>15</sup>

And never mind that in the same speech Reagan said earlier,

Our nation, too, has a legacy of evil with which it must deal. The glory of this land has been its capacity for transcending the moral evils of our past. For example, the long struggle of minority citizens...for equal rights, once a source of disunity and civil war is now a point of pride for all Americans. We must never go back. There is no room for racism, anti-Semitism, or other forms of ethnic and racial hatred in this country.<sup>16</sup>

Since that was Politically Correct to those who hated the other things he said, they didn't attack that. This is what I was talking about earlier regarding the way we tear each other apart rather than looking at ourselves first, which is, ironically, exactly what Reagan did when *he looked inward* at

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<sup>15</sup> Kengor.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Reagan, “The Evil Empire Speech (8 March 1983),” section 33, *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project*, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>. You can watch the entire speech here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSm-KAEFFA>.

his own nation *first* saying, “There is sin and evil in the world, and we’re enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might,” only to talk about our own evil and sin. Yeah, he said that in the same speech. And quite honestly, *this* is why they hated it. This is why they struck so fast and furious immediately after it. Because some things never change. Vipers can’t change their nature. They hate God. They hate the good. They refuse to look within and then to pray to the Lord as they seek the antidote.

But God can change a viper into a sheep. It starts by acknowledging that you are a viper. Not that Reagan or Trump, or Pelosi or Maxine are vipers. You. You are capable of and have in fact struck at many people many times with your mouth which is murder in God’s eyes, a throwing of your enemy off a cliff to the sharp rocks below. You need salvation from yourself, for your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? *Not you*. But the God of **Psalm 139** can and does. Since you cannot hide from his Spirit, turn to the Holy Spirit in meekness and humility, asking forgiveness for your many sins and begging him to then begin to turn the rudder of your tongue and thus move the rest of your body to be used for his glory.

This is the antidote to the serpentine poison that pulses throughout the veins of each one of us. This is how you will be able to recognize evil more honestly; you will be able to pray as David prayed, and rather than striking out, you will find comfort knowing that God will do what is right. This is the only hope of our civilization. Not neo-marxist revolutionaries taking to the streets or to the press or to the media. Not Q dealing with the enemies of truth in justice behind the scenes. Only Jesus Christ, who has left you in this world but has made you to be “not of it.” So, look to him and seek first *his* Kingdom. Pray with David for the eradication of evil to come through God’s justice. Pray for him to meet out justice and give them back what they deserve, to be caught in their own nets. You, set your heart on what is good and right. Obey his law. Do what he told you to do to your neighbor. Emulate and obey your Master in his life on this earth who showed and taught you have to deal with your enemies before the Judgment Day commences. And wait eagerly and expectantly for the return in Glory when *he* will judge the living and the dead.