

PSALMS

Chapter 140

Deliver Me, O LORD, from Evil Men

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men, 2 who plan evil things in their heart and stir up wars continually. 3 They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps. *Selah* 4 Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from violent men, who have planned to trip up my feet. 5 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* 6 I say to the LORD, You are my God; give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O LORD! 7 O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle. 8 Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted! *Selah* 9 As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them! 10 Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise! 11 Let not the slanderer be established in the land; let evil hunt down the violent man speedily! 12 I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy. 13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name; the upright shall dwell in your presence.

Ps 140 A prayer for deliverance from the plots and slander of unscrupulous enemies. It recalls Ps 58; 64 but employs a number of words found nowhere else in the OT. Four well-balanced stanzas are followed by a two-verse conclusion. The prayer is strikingly rich in physiological allusions: heart, head, tongue, lips, hands, feet—also ears (lit. “Give ear to,” v. 6) and teeth (by a wordplay on the Hebrew for “make sharp,” v. 3). See Ps 141. (CSB)

Imprecatory psalm; see p 879. David was the target of the plots and slanders of “evil men” throughout his life. King Saul tried to kill him (1Sm 19). David’s own son Absalom usurped his throne (2Sm 15). Shimei cursed him (2Sm 16:5–13). Sheba persuaded his subjects to reject his kingship (2Sm 20). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, violent men; vv 4–5, guard and preserve; vv 6–8, the Lord saves; vv 9–11, prayer against the violent men; vv 12–13, the Lord’s care. (TLSB)

The 140th psalm is a psalm of prayer against the proud, wicked saints who place many traps and annoyances in the right way, against God’s Word. They threaten and rage against all those who do not praise and follow their errors. The psalm prays that their plans may not succeed but rather may fall on their own head and that it will happen to them as to Pharaoh in the Red Sea, that the storm may hurl them into the sea and they may be drowned. Thus may such evil mouths be silenced and the believers remain before God forever. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

140:1–3 Rescue me from those “vipers.” (CSB)

Although the opening section is a prayer for deliverance, its main feature is a description of the treachery of David’s enemies. (PBC)

140:1 *evil men*. “Enemies” referred to in the Psalms often signify our spiritual enemies, namely, Satan and his devils. But here, they are clearly evil “men.” Believers can expect opposition, slander, and even physical assault from other people in this sinful world (Jn 15:20). (TLSB)

140:2 *who plan evil things in their heart* – Evil men devise evil things. And these schemes come from their heart, meaning it is their full intent to destroy the psalmist (s.v. Ps. 111:1). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

140:3 *tongue is sharp*. Words of evil people sting. (TLSB)

venom of asps. Their words are poisonous. (TLSB)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

140:4–5 Protect me from those proud and wicked hunters. (CSB)

David realizes that his only hope is in the Lord, so he turns to him. (PBC)

140:4 In verse 4 the psalmist turns immediately to prayer, repeating the first verse of the psalm essentially, but changing the first request to “keep me” (s.v. Ps. 12:7) and the first prepositional phrase to “from the hand of (power) of the wicked. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

140:5 *have hidden a trap for me* – Like trappers they have prepared traps to catch him unaware (see Pss. 31:4; 119:110, 142:3 and a41:9). Three times over he says that they have laid trap: they have hidden a snare, they have spread a net, and they have set traps. While it is possible that there might be have been physical ambushes planned to destroy him, it is more likely that slanderous accusation have been carefully prepared to catch him and destroy his daily activities, I.e, his life. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

the arrogant – Evil, arrogant people lay traps, such as the nets and snares designed to catch animals. (TLSB)

140:6–8 Do not let these wicked men attain their evil designs against me. (CSB)

David’s call for judgment on his enemies is expressed in the same spirit as the imprecatory psalms which we have studied previously, including Psalms 137 and 139. (PBC)

140:7 *O LORD, my Lord*. Expression of true personal faith. (TLSB)

covered my head. Metaphor is of a helmet, protecting one from a deadly blow. See “helmet of salvation” (Is 59:17; Eph 6:17). (TLSB)

140:8 SELAH – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

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140:9–11 Let the harm they plot against me recoil on their heads. (CSB)

140:9 *head.* God protects the psalmist’s head (v 7), but the head of his enemies will be subject to God’s judgment. (TLSB)

140:10 *burning coals ...fires.* This combination, together with the conjunction of fire and darkness in Job 15:30; 20:26, suggests the idea that the fire of God’s judgment (see, e.g., 21:9; 97:3; Isa 1:31; 26:11; 33:14) reaches even into the realm of the dead (see Job 31:12). (CSB)

Judgment is expressed in terms of both fire and water, perils that cannot be escaped. Raining fire from the heavens and being swallowed up by the earth are common images of judgment in Scripture (Gn 19:24; Ex 9:23; 15:12; Nu 16:28–32). (TLSB)

140:11 *hunt down.* May these hunters (vv. 4–5) themselves be hunted by the ruin they intended to bring on me. (CSB)

140:12–13 Confidence in God’s just judgment. (CSB)

Expresses assurance that God indeed has intervened, both for Himself and for those in need. (TLSB)

As he usually does, David concludes with an expression of confidence in the Lord’s help. (PBC)

140:13 *give thanks.* Having experienced God’s help. (CSB)

dwell in your presence. In contrast to the wicked. (CSB)

Ps 140 God’s judgment is harsh against those who use their words to harm others—through lies, gossip, slander, or other “poisonous” speech—as well as those who harm others through violence or subtle traps. God is on the side of the poor, the weak, and the oppressed. Those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake are blessed with the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:10–11). They are bearing the cross, in that Jesus too—the Son of David prefigured in this psalm—endured the vicious words and violent actions of “evil men” (v 1; Mt 26:57–68; 27:32–44). In Christ, we receive our vindication, our forgiveness, and assurance. • O Lord, protect us from “evil men.” Protect us, too, from being evil ourselves—forgive us for hurting other people through our words

or deeds. We turn to Christ, who was despised and afflicted, for our refuge and healing. Amen.
(TLSB)