

TEXTUAL ISSUES PSALM 141

Psalm 141:1-2. *Hear me, chasten me, keep me.* O Lord God Yahweh! I call out to You—I need You, oh I need You—come quickly, to me. Hear my voice when I cry out to You. As I pray, may my prayers be sent to You as incense delights You, and as my hands lift up toward You, just like the sacrifice of the evening.

- Q What do you call “Him” when talking to the Lord God Almighty? Do you ever speak separately to Holy Spirit or to Christ Jesus?
- Q When do you feel the Lord God is not listening? Should you call out to be heard?
- Q Why don’t we offer incense when worshipping collectively or individually today? Should there be an “evening sacrifice?”²¹

PSALM 141:1-10

O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. ²May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

³Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. ⁴Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.

⁵Let a righteous man [or *Let the Righteous One*] strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.

Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; ⁶their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. ⁷They will say, “As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave [Hebrew *Sheol*].”

⁸But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in YOU I take refuge—do not give me over to death.

⁹Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers.

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

²¹Hebrews 13:15-16 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

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Psalm 141:3-7 *Hear me, chasten me, keep me.*

Here's what I need O Lord God Jehovah—

- Guard my mouth O Lord God Yahweh; keep watch over the entrance to my lips.
- Keep my *raison d'être* from evil; keep my behavior from wickedness, and people who do wicked things.
- Don't even let me eat at the table of the wicked, regardless of the delicacies offered.
- May the righteous punish me;²² it is a kindness to be rebuked—it is like being anointed with oil. May I not refuse this anointing.

PSALM 141:3-7

Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. ⁴ Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.

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Regardless, my prayers are still against the wicked's evil doing; may their superiors be cast from power and the wicked learn from my words. They'll remember when they see their bones scattered all over, just like a plow breaks up the clods of a field.

- Q When do you have the biggest problem controlling what and to whom you say things? Why is it so difficult?²³
- Q Why is our *raison d'être* drawn to what is evil? Why the continuing challenge?
- Q About what delicacies of evildoers do you suppose the psalmist was writing? Which tempt you the most? [Hint: funny off-color tv sitcoms?]
- Q Which is more troubling—having a righteous person call you out, or the Lord God Himself?

²²*Let a righteous man strike me.* The disciplining blows and rebukes of the righteous are the true “kindness” (Hebrew *hesed*, meaning “love” or “acts of authentic friendship;” see Proverbs 27:6—“Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”).

²³Regarding the difficulty of controlling our speech, James says it this way (James 3:12)—

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt [or *bitter*] water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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- Q How has your head been anointed with the oil of rebuke? Have you ever refused that oil—why?
- Q About what are we to pray regarding doers of evil? And their rulers? Why? What did it mean then to “have one’s bones scattered at the mouth of the grave?”

SHEOL—Believers before Christ called the dark and shadowy place where dead people go “Sheol.” When you got there, your life seemed thoroughly finished. Many psalmists emphatically did not want to go there, and they asked God, when praying for His help, what possible good there might be in death. “Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?” (Psalm 88:12). Sheol was the great leveler: it meant the end of plans, of worship, of a relationship with God (Psalms 30:9; 88:5; 146:4). The dead were found there, not the living.

Yet some psalmists hint at a happier view. They hold such a strong view of God’s authority that they show—vaguely, but unmistakably—God’s power over the grave. For instance, God is *in* Sheol (Psalm 139:8). He—and only He—can redeem a person from there (49:7-9,15). God will not let his “Holy One” see decay—a claim that both Peter and Paul saw as a clear prediction of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Psalm 16:10, quoted in Acts 2:27; 13:35).

What did they expect life after death to be like, if God’s power redeemed someone from Sheol? You won’t find a clearly defined picture of heaven here—only hints. The psalmists’ thoughts center on God’s face and his presence. For God is the only unchangeable reality: wherever you are, in life or in death, he will be there. He is the ultimate reward to those who love him.²⁴

Psalm 141:8-10 *Hear me, chasten me, keep me.* Regardless of all that’s been said, O Sovereign Yahweh, my eyes are focused on You, and You alone. It is in You I find safety—do not give me up to death. Keep me from the snares people have set for me, the traps of those who do evil. May the wicked fall into their own traps, while I walk around safely.

PSALM 141:8-10

But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in YOU I take refuge—do not give me over to death.

⁹ Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers.

¹⁰ Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

- Q What is the primary means by which our eyes focus on an object? [Hint: direction of gaze, direct vs. peripheral, still vs. movement, short vs. far sighted...]
- Q What is there about the Lord God Yahweh which provides refuge, even refuge from death (presence in sheol) itself?
- Q From what snares and traps do you need particular protection?
- Q Is it right (righteous) to pray for the wicked “to fall into their own nets?”
- Q How do we safely pass these snaring nets?

²⁴Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton’s Interactive NIV © 1996.

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