PSALM 141

GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

Confidence in Justice — *Feb. 25, 2024*

I. IMPACT

A. Lesson: The plots and plans of men cannot withstand God's justice. He graces his people with strength to withstand evil as they wait for Him to rectify all wrongs.

B. In the New Testament. Rev. 5:8 and 8:3-4 speaks of the lamenting prayers of the saints coming up to God's throne as **incense**, borrowing imagery used in Ps 140:2.

C. In Jewish and Christian Traditions: When liturgies were composed for the 2nd Temple, Ps 141 found its way into a rotation of public usage. This continued in the early Christian church. Chrysostom (AD 345–407) noted that Christians often sang it though there were lines in it not easily understood.

II. GENRE: Lament of the Individual

A. Ps. 141 contains many features often found in laments. The most notable absence of a vow to give public thanks after the time of trial is over.

B. In some ways the psalm feels like a wisdom poem due to its many contrasts between the righteous and the wicked. But the poem is clearly intended primarily as a **prayer**, not instruction.

III. SETTING

A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

1. David, during some unknown era of his life (v. 1040-970 BC).

2. As in Ps 140, David speaks of enemies setting traps for him.

PSALM 141
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PURPOSE: The psalmist presents an evening prayer for grace to resist the temptations of the wicked and to survive their persecutions. While he has confidence in good mortal justice, his ultimate confidence is in the justice & care of Yahweh.

Type: Lament of the Individual **Author:** David (c. 1040-970 BC)
Note: Translations of vv. 5-7 vary widely. See the rendering in the New English Translation (NET).
Collection: Part of the final set of Davidic songs (Pss 138-145)

HEADING v. 0	OPENING PLEAS FOR HELP vv. 1-2	CENTRAL REQUESTS FOR GRACE vv. 3-5	CONFIDENCE IN JUSTICE vv. 6-8	CONCLUDING PLEAS FOR HELP vv. 8c-10
Song Type A "Psalm" (intended for instrumental accompaniment)	Pleadings for Yahweh's Attention v. 1 Pleadings Offered as Acceptable Worship v. 2	Prayers for Sanctifying Restraint vv. 3-4 To Abstain from Evil Speech v. 3 To Abstain from Evil Desires v. 4a To Abstain from Sharing with Evildoers v. 4b Prayers for Righteous Reproof v. 5abc Commitment to Pray against Wickedness v. 5d	Confidence in Good Mortal Justice vv. 6-7 Eventual Execution of the Wicked v. 6a The Judges' Reception of David's Legal Pleadings vv. 6b-7 Confession of Trust in Divine Justice v. 8ab	Pleading for Protection v. 8c Pleading for Deliverance from Traps Set by the Wicked v. 9 Imprecation for Reciprocity on the Wicked v. 10
Authorship David				

3. Ps 142:0 alludes to a time of David's hiding in a cave which could fit with his flight from Saul (1 Sam 22-24) or Absalom (2 Sam 17:9. Pss 140-141 may also be from the same period.

B. PLACEMENT

1. Pss 138-145 are the last Davidic pss in the Psalter. The first and last (138, 145) are songs of thanks surrounding laments.

2. Ps 141 closely echoes Ps 140.

   a. They share similar terms, topics, and tone.

   b. Both reference various parts of the body such as hands, mouth, lips, heart, head, bones, eyes.

   c. Both refer to traps set by the wicked (140:4-5; 141:9-10) and to evil speech (140:3, 11; 141:3)

3. The pss which follow also reference lying enemies (144:8) who are setting traps for the godly (142:3d).

III. COMMENTARY

A. An Evening Song: In v. 2 David likes his prayers for help to the daily sacrifices at the Tabernacle.

1. Incense was offered when the priests trimmed the wicks on the menorah each morning and evening (Ex 30:7-8). Evening sacrifices of grain (Lev. 6:20) and a burnt offering (1 Chron 16:39-40) were performed each sunset.

2. Just as Yahweh accepted properly offered sacrifices at night, David prays that his nighttime prayer for help will be accepted.

3. When Hebrew people were separated from the sanctuary, they often scheduled times of prayer to coincide with the evening and morning sacrifices at the sanctuary to which they longed to go. Dan 9:4-23; Ezra 9:4-5.

B. Careful with His Words. In v. 3 David asks that God help him with his tongue that he not participate in sinful speech. While his enemies said all sorts of sinful things against him (140:3, 11), David does not want to reciprocate.

C. Matters of the Heart. In v. 4 David asks God to keep his heart from savoring sinful desires & acting on them. The sweet things of sin are tempting, so David wants his affections redirected.

D. Desiring Reproof. In many laments David prays as an innocent sufferer, but in v. 5 he acknowledges that he is prone to err. He asks God to use righteous people to knock him over the head when needed, and that he might receive their righteous rebukes as an honor.

> "Many years in church ministry have taught me that opinions are to be weighed, not counted! And when something negative does need to be said to us, we shall be wise to remember the well-spoken words of Proverbs 27:6, that 'wounds from a friend can be trusted'." – Michael Wilcock, *The Message of the Psalms: Songs for the People of God.*

E. Tough Translation. Vv. 5-7 are notoriously difficult to translate, and since ancient days very different translations have emerged.

1. Verse 6 requires special attention. The Heb. reads, "They are thrown down by the hands of a cliff, their judges." The VOC on the back page follows the New English Translation (NET), "They will be thrown down the sides of the cliff by their judges. They [the judges] will listen to my words ...."

2. This reading indicates that David has some confidence in good human judges, and that they will listen to his appeal (v. 6b) about how the righteous are on the verge of extermination (v. 7).

F. Ultimate Trust. Whatever is true of the human judges (v. 6), David's greatest confidence is in Lord Yahweh in whom he trusts (v. 8).