

Psalm 141

Evening Prayer I Sunday Week 1

The Psalmist is under pressure to join forces with ‘those who do guilty deeds’(verse 4). Perhaps he is being pressured to join those collaborating with the Syrian rulers who were trying to undermine the Torah at the time of the Maccabees. They are enticing him with the ‘delicacies’ of a luxurious lifestyle (verses 4 and 5). He is severely tempted to go along with them; hence the intensity of his plea (in verses 1-5). He tries to dissuade the evildoers. When they fall they will realise that his advice was, indeed, ‘pleasant words’(verse 6). He continues to pray against the disgraceful behaviour of those attempting to win him over to their cause (verse 5). The title reads: ‘A Psalm* of David.’

I will make them joyful in my house of prayer.

– Isaiah 56:7

King Ahaz commanded the priest Uriah, saying,
‘Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt offering,
and the evening grain offering.’

– 2Kings 16:15

At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting.

– Ezra 9:5

Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.

– Daniel 9:21

Who will set a guard over my mouth, and an effective seal upon my lips, so that I may not fall because of them, and my tongue may not destroy me? YHWH, Father and Master of my life, do not abandon me to their designs, and do not let me fall because of them! Who will set whips over my thoughts, and the discipline of wisdom over my mind, so as not to spare me in my errors, and not overlook my sins?

– Sirach 22:27 - 23:2

He wants YHWH to keep guard not only over his mouth, but also over his heart that he will not let attachment to pleasures distract him from obedience to the Torah.

**¹I call upon you, YHWH*;
come quickly to me;
listen to my voice
when I call to you.**

**²Let my prayer be counted
as incense before you, and
the lifting up of my hands
as an evening sacrifice.**

**³Set a guard over my mouth,
YHWH; keep watch over the
door of my lips.**

**⁴Do not turn my heart to
any evil, do not let me busy
myself with wicked deeds
in company with those who
do guilty* deeds; do not let
me eat of their delicacies.**

Resisting temptation

⁵Let the righteous* strike me down; let the faithful correct me.

Never let the oil of the wicked anoint my head, for my prayer is continually against their wicked deeds.

⁶When they are given over to those who will condemn them, then they will learn that my words were pleasant.

He would prefer that the ‘faithful’ [the ‘Hasidim’] strike him down than that he would betray the Torah. The Hasidim are determined to resist the aggressive cultural imperialism of Antiochus IV and to remain faithful to the Covenant. The author needs their correction to strengthen him against the temptations of the ‘good life’. Compare the parental advice warning a son against being seduced:

Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck. My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the Pit. We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty. Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse’ – my child, do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths; for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood. For in vain is the net baited while the bird is looking on; yet they lie in wait-- to kill themselves! and set an ambush – for their own lives! Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

– Proverbs 1:8-19

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with perfume; my cup overflows.

– Psalm 23:5

The wise, when rebuked, will love you.

– Proverbs 9:8

Whoever rebukes a person will afterward find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue.

– Proverbs 28:23

You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

– Luke 7:46

The psalmist anticipates the judgment of God upon them. They will be flung headlong as from a precipice into the gaping hole of Sheol. They will be hurled over the precipice, like Jezebel from the balcony (2Kings 9:33).

Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says YHWH.

– Obadiah 3-4

The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill. Although you make your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down, says YHWH.

– Jeremiah 49:16

The psalmist is praying that they will fail and will be punished as they deserve.

⁷Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the ground, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol.

⁸But my eyes are turned toward you, O God, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenceless.

⁹Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me, and from the snares of evildoers.

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape.