

The Poison of the Viper

Key Verse:

*DELIVER ME, O Lord, from evil men; PRESERVE ME from violent men;
They devise mischiefs in their heart; continually they gather together and stir up wars.
They sharpen their tongues like a serpent's; adders' poison is under their lips.*
Psalms 140:1-3 (AMP)

Today's Portion for the Journey:

The context of this passage is based on King Saul's desire to kill David. Saul is consumed with anger, jealousy and hatred toward David. He sought every means possible to destroy David. David was pursued unjustly and moment by moment felt his life was in jeopardy.

We will each face times in our lives when we find ourselves surrounded by evil. Psalm 140 offers a vivid description to turn to when confronted with evil words and slander against us. It not only describes what we are going through and shows us the dark power of words spoken against us, it also offers us a powerful prayer to stand against these words.

As believers, we must remember that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers and forces of darkness in high places. It is important that we discern when we are facing the demonic. We are not to go looking for trouble, but we need to know how to stand in the LORD's power and use His spiritual weapons. He is our deliverer and our equipper!

Join me in my meditation on Psalm 140 and ask the LORD to provide insight and the ability to stand firm and equip you in the day of battle.

v. 1 "Rescue me"

The word "Rescue," used in this passage is also translated "deliver." The Hebrew word is chalats (Strong's #2502). It is a Prim. Root meaning to pull off; hence to strip, (reflex) to, depart, by implication to deliver, *equip for fight*, present, strengthen, *to make strong for war*, arm self, go, ready, armed (man, soldier), draw out, make fat, loose, ready *prepare*, put off, take away, withdraw self. Put off self (take away, withdraw self). Self has to die in order for us to stand in the strength of the LORD.

Hence this word speaks of preparing us and equipping us to do battle, to enter into warfare. I love to think of the LORD as our white knight, who carries us away to a place of safety far away from the battle! The truth is, He trains our hands for battle. Our rescue is not necessarily performed by removing us but by equipping us to be victorious. David is asking God to prepare him to stand against the evil men or the evil that men speak; not to simply be taken away from all that is evil. How often do we cry out to be removed rather than to be strengthened and prepared for the battle against evil? This is the higher good; God's way is always to meet our difficulties head on, not to run or hide from them. God's way is to give us all that we need to be victorious.

Lord, grant me the willingness to remain in the battles You have chosen and stand equipped and strengthened in Your strength against the forces of evil. As David cried out, so I also cry out, "LORD, Jehovah equip me, strengthen me and arm me in order that I can be ready and prepared to stand

against the enemy according to Ephesians 6. Help me to stand in the battles YOU have chosen for me. Give me discernment to know when to stand and LORD, help me to recognize my need for You that I would not depend upon my own devices or battle against flesh and blood. Help me to discern between good and evil and protect me from being passive in the face of darkness.

v. 1 "O LORD"

David looked to Jehovah for his deliverance, he cried out to the LORD, his covenant keeping God, because he knew his own inadequacy to handle the problem. Crying out to God should be our first response to troubles, not our response when we have exhausted our own efforts!!

v. 1 "from evil men" This would perhaps better be translated, "from the evil of men."

"Evil 7451 'ra is from 7489, bad or evil: 'adversity, affliction, calamity, displeasure, distress, evil, grievous, harm, hurt, ill-favoredness, misery, sorrow", troublesome, not -pleasant, sad, sore, wicked, wretchedness, wrong. From 7489 meaning, to spoil - (lit.' by breaking into pieces) fig. to make or morally be good for nothing i.e. bad (phys. Or morally afflict, associate selves, break down into pieces, displease, bring or do evil, do harm to, hurt, behave self , do mischief, do wicked, deal worse. **It is important to note that this same word is translated slanderer when it is used in verse 11.**

The evil referred to here may not take the form of vile moral evil such as murder or thievery, but can also be in the form of adversity, affliction or calamity. We can encounter the evil in men in those who are steeped in sorrow, self pity, discouragement, misery, hurt or wretchedness in their walk. The words they speak may be inspired by the very pit of hell. Verses 2-3 reveal the results of contact with such men whose hearts are not right before God. 1) They stir up wars and 2) their words carry the poison of Satan. This evil can come to us not only through our enemies but our friends whose hearts are not right with God and also the television which is full of 'wrong thinking'. Jesus recognized that Peter's words were inspired by Satan, and He identified the words as from Satan, rebuked Peter and refused to receive the words that were spoken that were contrary to God's will. (Matthew 16:23) Thus in these verses David is asking God to make him strong, equipped and able to stand against the 'attitudes' of those whose hearts are not right with God. He recognized the tremendous power of those attitudes to be imparted to us and the effect they can have upon our relationship with God.

(Insert example of what happens in real snake bite: The poison of asps goes into the blood stream, cuts off the air supply or shuts down the internal organs. It affects the nerves and ultimately kills the body.)

The entire chapter speaks clearly NOT of physical violence or moral wickedness but of the words of the tongue arising out of a heart which contains ra'. I see this as an attack coming not in words spoken against us, but the power of words which are spoken to us which carry the ability to invoke in us discouragement, fear or pity. These are words which subtly slander God because of their faithlessness. We need to be alert to words carrying attitudes of bitterness, faithlessness, moral laxity or fear. I believe the Lord is speaking to me specifically to be careful of those who speak in discouragement. These are the words given life by the enemy of our souls and implanted into the hearts of the undiscerning who receive them as their own.

"v. 1 Preserve me" against the violent men

Preserve (5341 natsar means to guard, in a good sense, protect, maintain, obey, etc. In a bad sense it can mean to conceal, to be hidden, besieged, keep, keeper, observe, and preserve, subtil, watcher, or watchman.

God's word tells us that He will preserve us by bringing us to abide in the secret place with Him. It is in the secret place that we are kept safe from all violence. David is calling on God to guard and protect him from "violent men". (Refer back to notes on violence, Jesus as the prince of Peace.)

Lord, I see so clearly that the enemy's prime goal is not so much the violence or injustice itself, but to entice or provoke us into leaving the secret place with You. When encountering violence it is vital that we look to You to keep us and preserve our spirits. Please establish our feet to run to You when encountering those who would do violence. Your grace is sufficient for me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

v. 1 "violent men"

Violent 2555 chamac - violence by implication wrong; unjust gain: cruelty, damage, false, injustice, oppressor, unrighteous, violence, violent dealing, wrong. It would seem the wickedness of ra would seek to lure us from God by instilling emotions foreign to God's peace while the 'chamac' violence would try to drive us through a more direct, less subtle assault. The purpose of the subtle attack is to lure us into exposure so we are undefended and then we are vulnerable and defenseless to a more violent attack. The violence carries an aspect of cruelty that ra does not contain. In both cases Satan is very present, his goal to cause us to lose the place of peace in the shelter of God. Oh how gullible we are to be so easily tricked into leaving the protection of the very One who can keep us from all harm. This is why as David, we must cry to God for His protection! The word "chamac" implies everything which God is NOT:

Violence	God is Prince of Peace
Loving war, warlike	peaceful
Unjust	Just
Cruel	Loving, kind, tenderhearted
Damage, destruction	Creative, restoring, building
False	Truth
Oppressor	Deliverer
Unrighteousness	Righteousness

Yet how often do we blame God when we encounter chamac violence or behaviors of this nature. Are we not vulnerable to this lie because we have not been abiding in the secret place God has provided for us through the blood of Jesus? Though we abide not, we can still call as David called for God's rescue and preservation.

Prayed for D & B that God would preserve, to teach them to go to the hidden place with God and to dwell with Him when the enemy attacks. That they would not be driven away from God. Let them see the dichotomy between God who preserves, protects and defends and Satan who destroys and oppresses with cruelty and injustice. Open the eyes!

Open our eyes, dear loving Father, to see You in peace, justice, love, kindness, creativity, restoration, truth, deliverance, and righteousness and to recognize the works of Satan who comes as a roaring lion (chamac) and an angel of light (ra') seeking whom he may devour. Grant discernment to see the

workings of Satan rather than the "flesh and blood' men who are his pawns. Bring deliverance from chamac violence by bringing into the covering of God's love.

vs. 2 "who devise"

Devise (imagine) 2803 chashab is a primary root meaning to plait or interpenetrate, i.e. (lit. to weave or fabricate) and (fig. to plot or contrive) usually in a malicious sense, hence from the mental effort) to think, regard, value, compute: make account of, conceive, work, consider, count, cunning (man, work, workman, devise, esteem, find out forecast, hold, imagine, impute, invent, be like, mean, purpose, reckoning, regard, think. THIS IS THE PRIMARY ROOT OF THE WORD "HESHBON", the capital city of Sihon's rule. Sihon's rulership is symbolic of the intellect. See notes on Sihon and Og.)

Chashab (28030 is the word which Joseph used to describe the evil intentions of his brothers when he was sold into slavery. Joseph could see that though his brothers had thoughts to do evil against him, God had used this evil plan to bring good to Joseph and preservation of his entire family and the future of mankind. (Gen. 50:20)

I Samuel 18:20-29 describes an evil plot (chashab which Saul formulated to get David killed by the Philistines. He found out his daughter Michal loved David. Thus Saul decided to offer her to David "that she would be a snare to him." (vs. 21) Saul planned that David would be killed by the Philistines when he attempted to get the 100 foreskins that Saul was requiring as the dowry price.

Esther 8:3 Haman devised a plot to destroy all of the Jews because Mordecai would not bow down and worship him.

NOTE: Two factors run through each of these situations in which evil was devised against God's people: jealousy and selfish ambition. Daniel also experienced an evil plot against his life by the satraps arising out of their Jealousy and selfish ambition toward his high place in the king's courts.

James 3:14-16 "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition ... this wisdom is earthly, and natural, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

Chashab is used frequently with mezimmah (plot) or as in KJV device or "mischevious" device. See Ps. 21:11. Plot (4209 mezimmah from 2161 a plan, usually evil, wicked device, discretion, witty invention, mischevious device, thought, wickedness. 2161-zamam, a prim. root to plan, devise, imagine, plot, purpose, think evil.

Jeremiah 11:19 "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; and I did not know they had devised plots against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." (vs. 18, God showed him the deeds of the wicked against him.)

Chashab speaks of a well-conceived plan. Ezekiel 38:10 describes how this happens through thoughts entering the mind and resulting in the person or persons devising an evil plan. These plans come as inventions or inspirations. (See also Proverbs 16:9 and 16:30) In addition to the devising of evil plans the word is also used in an artistic sense of creatively designing various forms of craftsmanship and music. It is also used in the context of the plans and purposes of God in His dealings with man.

God in His sovereignty is always behind all the plans of the evil ones to work all things for good and for His purposes. (See Jeremiah 18:18-23; Isaiah 13:17; Nehemiah 6:2) The enemy will plan to harm us when we are serving the Lord, speaking His words and building in His kingdom work. In Nehemiah 6:5-7 the line of attack was slander and lies, same strategy used in Ezra. Nehemiah told them this was not true but an invention of their own mind. The purpose of the attack was to try to frighten or discourage them from doing their work (vs. 9). Nehemiah had an understanding of the tactics: "He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me."

Nahum 1:9,11 reveals that God will make a complete end of the plans devised against Him, He will cut off those who plot evil against the Lord.

v. 2 "they continually stir up wars" or "Continually are they gathered together and stir up wars" (Amplified)

"wars" (4421) milchamah from 3898 (in the sense of fighting, a battle, engagement, generally war, i.e. warfare), battle fighting, warrior. 3898 lacham, a primary root meaning to feed on, figuratively to consume, to battle, as destruction, devour, fight, overcome, prevail, make war. It is the goal of the enemy to draw us into his warfare, to distract us from God's plan. Nehemiah provides an excellent example of this through Sanballat and Tobiah. We become drawn into his battle when we listen to his words of wickedness, when we eat of their delicacies. Note the enemy will particularly speak discontent into our hearts concerning our marriages, spouses, economic situations, position in society, our jobs or service. We must be aware of selfish ambitions and bitter jealousy which allow the enemy to use us in his evil plans.

v. 3 "They sharpen" The Hebrew word for "sharpen" is 'shanan' (Strong's #8150). This word means to whet (to sharpen by constant rubbing and friction, to provoke, excite, make angry, urge on, to instigate); to pierce, to inculcate (to drive or force one's way in, to impress by frequent admonitions, to teach diligently through constant repetition, to urge on the mind. This word is used in reference to sharpening a sword or arrows or the tongue. See Ps. 64:3 where they sharpen their tongue like a sword in preparation for attacking the innocent (malicious, malignant or cutting words). The word malignant offers additional insight, in as much as a sword can be deadly, the words malignant and malicious also mean that which is dangerous, especially with reference to one's health, progressive with uncontrolled growth.)

v. their tongues" The Hebrew word for 'tongue' used in this passage is 'lashon' (Strong's #3956). This word is translated 'evil speaker' or 'slanderer' in Ps. 140:11. It is used 117 times in the Old Testament and most of the references refer to the misuse of the tongue. It is used most often in Ps. 52 (entire chapter, but see especially v. 2,4). The word means, "a charmer (as one who makes incantations and spells); a slanderer, one who uses their language or speech as a weapon, a wedge or a flame.

Adam Clark offers this commentary on this word, as used in v. 11: "Let not an evil speaker be established—*איש לשון*, "a man of tongue." There is much force in the rendering of this clause in the Chaldee *גָּבָר דְּמִשְׁתַּעַן לֵישׁ תְּלִיתָי* gebar demishtai lishan telithai, "The man of detraction, or inflammation, with the three-forked tongue." He whose tongue is set on fire from hell; the tale-bearer, slanderer, and dealer in scandal: with the three-forked tongue; wounding three at once: his neighbour whom he slanders; the person who receives the slander; and himself who deals in it. What a just

description of a character which God, angels, and good men must detest! Let not such a one be established in the land; let him be unmasked; let no person trust him;

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament provide ways in which the tongue is the agent of many evils:

ξ subversion (Proverbs 10:31)

ξ slander (Proverbs 17:4)

ξ flattery (Psalm 5:9)

ξ mischief and trouble (Psalm 10:7)

ξ arrogance (Psalm 12:4), hurt to others (Psalm 52:2)

ξ falsehood (Proverbs 17:4; Proverbs 6:17; Proverbs 12:19; Proverbs 21:6; Proverbs 26:28; Psalm 78:36; Psalm 120:2-3; Micah 6:12)

ξ the tongue of a viper (Psalm 140:3)

ξ a bow or arrow (Jeremiah 9:3, 8

ξ a sharp sword (Psalm 57:4; Psalm 64:3; Hosea 7:16)

ξ a razor (Psalm 52:2)

ξ The tongue can be used as a weapon of death (Jeremiah 18:18) because "life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

One cannot look at the meaning of these words without seeing the incredible power and danger the tongue poses to one's very life! We must not be passive when those who are evil are speaking against God's anointed ones. We must pray and obey the LORD to take a stand when He directs. See Ps. 64:1-10. All such use of the tongue is ultimately directed against God, for while it violates mostly the ninth commandment, it is accompanied by an arrogance and boasting that usurps the place of God. Hosea 7:16

vs. 3 “as a serpent” The first reference in the Scriptures to the “serpent” are the well-known passages referring to Satan, whose deceptive words caused Adam and Eve to sin. (See Gen. 3:1,2,4,13,14). The Hebrew word for ‘serpent’ is ‘nachash (Strong’s #5175). This word is translated either serpent or snake. It is used not only in reference to snakes in the natural world, Satan, but comes from the root #1347, that may be translated dragon, fleeing serpent, or Leviathan. (See Job 26:13, Isa. 27:1).

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament offers these additional characteristics to understand the implications of the word ‘serpent.’

- Genesis 49:17 seems to refer to a serpent's stealth
- Psalm 58:4; Psalm 140:3; Proverbs 23:32; Eccles. 10:8,11; Jeremiah 8:17; Amos 5:19; and Amos 9:3 to the poisonous bite
- Proverbs 30:19 to their climbing ability on a smooth surface; and
- Jeremiah 46:22 to the hissing sound they make.
- (Psalm 54:4-5; Eccles. 10:11; Jeremiah 8:17) may refer to "snake" charming. Again, the word *nāḥāš* is similar to the word *laḥash* (enchantment or divination) in those passages (cf. *nāḥash*).

In addition, in 2 Cor. 11:3, Paul said the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness; Rev. 12:9 said the “serpent of old” deceived the whole world.

v. 3 “Poison of a viper” A viper is a particular type of snake. While some snakes are constrictors who tighten their grip on their victim, and eventually cause them to suffocate, a viper kills through the poison of their venom. Vipers have extremely sharp fangs by which the venom is delivered through their bite. Vipers have the most highly developed delivery system and deadliest venom amongst all of the poisonous creatures on earth. It is interesting to note that snakes, apart from their venom are not that tough and have no other defense systems against their enemies. Many vipers have a combination of four types of venom that particularly attack various systems of their victim’s body.

1. **Hemotoxic venom** – attack the heart and cardiovascular system of the victim. The venom attacks the red blood cells and causes a breakdown of the blood’s ability to clot. The effect of the bite is to cause hemorrhaging, stroke, or heart attack. Fatal without administration of anti-venom.
2. **Neurotoxin venom** – attack the nervous system and the brain. This is a very fast acting venom that causes paralysis, numbness and respiratory failure. Fatal without administration of anti-venom.
3. **Cytotoxic venom** – attacks at the cellular level, ruptures cell membranes, destroys tissue and causes intense pain and suffering. Death will soon follow unless one receives an anti-venom.

One can easily see the spiritual application from these lessons learned from nature! Isn’t it interesting that the anti-venom for a snake bite is taken from the blood of one who has been bitten and survived a snake bite. It is also noteworthy that there is a very serious shortage of snake anti-venom in the world today. We can be thankful that Jesus survived every effort of the “Serpent” to destroy Him! In order for us to survive, we must turn to Him and the power of His blood to destroy this deadly venom seeking to take our lives!

v. 3 “is under their lips” The Hebrew word for ‘lips’ is ‘sepheth’ (Strong’s #8193.) it comes from the root word meaning, ‘termination.’ Lips refer to speech, gossip, babbling or language. Most frequently *śāpā* refers to the organ of speech. The lips are the gates of speech, and hence the gates of honesty or deception, righteousness or wickedness, wisdom or folly. Thus we read, "The lips of the righteous feed many," and "Let the lying lips be put to silence" (Proverbs 10:21; Psalm 31:18 [H 19]). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.

v. 4 “Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked....” “Keep me!” What a beautiful word this is to all believers! The Lord is our keeper! The Hebrew word for ‘keep’ is ‘shamar’ (Strong’s #8104). The word is translated: watchman; one who faithfully heeds, keeps and watches over His charge with great attentiveness. The Hebrew word is a

a primitive root that means to *hedge* about (as with thorns), i.e. *guard*; generally to *protect*, *attend to*; be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep (-er, self), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save. The idea is that of a guard who remains steadily awake, watchful and alert to any sign of danger toward His charge. This word is used five times in Psalm 121!

In conclusion, we must not be naïve regarding the danger of the powerful words of those spoken by the serpent. We also must not be afraid of them, but turn as David did, to the LORD. We can pray for the LORD to rescue us (equip us for battle); preserve us (hide and cover us in the shelter of His wings); and keep us (watch over us and keep us within a hedge of thorns).

Scriptures for further meditation: Continue to read and study Ps. 140. Philippians 4:6-8,11 (See also the Portions for the Journey study, “The Battle Belongs to the Lord.”