

Psalm 60
2 Samuel 8
Psalm 60
Matthew 3

“Spiritual Warfare”

September 9, 2012

Psalm 60 opens with the following inscription:

Introduction: The King Who Subdues His Enemies

To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth. A Miktam^[a] of David; for instruction; when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.

How does Christ execute the office of a king?

“Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to his will,
in ruling and defending us,
and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.” (SC 26)

What did David accomplish as King?

He defeated his enemies, right?
But what does that mean?

It *doesn't* mean that he killed them all!
It means that he subdued them to his will.

We saw last week that David wound up with a whole lot of Gittites
in his administration.

Obed-Edom (who was almost certainly an Edomite) was another.

Have you ever heard of Uriah – *the Hittite!*

David's administration was full of *foreigners*.

Why?

Because David subdued the nations to his will.

When David wrote Psalm 60, he was not saying,

“Help me kill as many people as possible!”

He was saying,

“Thy Kingdom come!”

As we sing Psalm 60, we pray that God would indeed “go forth with our armies,”

as we pray that God's kingdom would advance through the preaching of the gospel.

As Cassiodorus put it in the 6th century,

“we must realize that these wars are a description in figure of the Lord Savior's victories
which he wins throughout the whole world over pagans and the faithless.” (p62)

2 Samuel 8 provides us with the historical background behind Psalm 60.

But if we are going to sing Psalm 60 with understanding,
we also need to see the geography that's depicted here.

If you look at a map of the Promised Land,
you will see the Jordan River running straight down from the Sea of Galilee
to the Dead Sea.

North of Galilee is the territory of the Arameans (the Syrians).

Damascus is their chief capital,

but you also hear of the Arameans from Zobah.

The Arameans were one of the most powerful peoples in the region at the time.

(If you have been paying attention to the news, you know that Syria right now
is in the throes of a civil war.

That's the same region.)

The Ammonites and Moabites (the children of Lot) were in the southeast,
the Ammonites were between the Jabbok River

(the "Valley of Succoth" to use the phrase from Psalm 60)

and the Dead Sea,

while the Moabites were due east of the Dead Sea.

The Edomites were on the south end of the Dead Sea.

And then the Philistines were on the southwest – along the Mediterranean.

Now, to give you some idea of the scale here,

the whole distance between Damascus (the capital of Aram) in the north,

and Edom in the south,

is around 200 miles.

200 miles is the distance between New York and Washington DC,

or from here to the Ohio River!

And yet, in the span of 200 miles,

you would travel from Syria, through Gilead (eastern Israel),

Ammon, Moab, and finally Edom.

In other words, the entire region that we are discussing,

is roughly the size (and shape) of the state of Indiana.

The Phoenicians (of Tyre and Sidon) live in LaPorte (Gary is out in the Mediterranean!).

The Arameans control the northern third of the region

(from South Bend through Fort Wayne!).

The Jordan River is US-31.

The Sea of Galilee is around Kokomo,

Jerusalem is just west of Indianapolis,
and Jericho is just south of Indianapolis.

The Ammonites live in Muncie,
the Moabites further south in Greensburg,
the Edomites live along the Ohio River,
and the Philistines from Evansville to Terre Haute.

Psalm 60
Read Matthew 3

John the Baptist describes baptism in terms of the coming of the kingdom of God.
Those who are baptized are identified with the coming kingdom.
The Pharisees and Sadducees also come to him for baptism –
and he marvels, “who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

As John stands at the Jordan River,
the border between Israel and the Ammonites and Moabites,
John understands that baptism signals judgment –

because the one who comes after, will come to gather the wheat into the barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

When the King comes, judgment comes.

From the superscription of Psalm 60, you would expect a song of victory –
after all, David and his generals have just defeated *both Syria and Edom!*
But instead the tone of the whole Psalm is that of *lament*.

Perhaps it reflects the comment of a wise general who once stood on the field of battle and said,
“there is nothing worse than victory – except defeat!”

Yes, David has won a great victory –
but at what cost?

The victory of David over his enemies has only made things worse (at least for the moment).

Read v1-4

1. The Wine that Made Us Stagger: When God Rejected Us (v1-4)

*O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses;
you have been angry; oh, restore us.*

² *You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open;
repair its breaches, for it totters.*

³ *You have made your people see hard things;
you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger.*

⁴ *You have set up a banner for those who fear you,
that they may flee to it from the bow.*^[b] *Selah*

Each of the images in the first four verses vividly depicts the situation.

In verse 1, “you have rejected us – broken our defenses.”

the foundation is laid for what comes next.

Here is the problem at the root of everything else.

God has rejected us – *God* has broken our defenses.

We saw last week that if *God is for us*, who can be against us?

Now we see that if God is *against us*, if the anger of the LORD burns against us,
then we have no hope – until he *restores us!*

In verse 2, the image of the earthquake – tearing the land apart –
reflects what happens in a brutal war.

The marching of a large army can literally cause the earth to shake.

And when that army has passed through, the land is torn apart.

Armies plunder.

They’re hungry – and so they eat whatever they can find.

The land itself is devastated by an invading army!

And the people are even more so.

Verse 3 depicts this:

“You have made your people see hard things;
you have given us wine to drink that makes us stagger.”

Perhaps you have seen pictures of Europe after WWI or WWII.

War may sometimes be necessary.

But war is *never* a good thing!

Perhaps you have seen the statistics on “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”
coming out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In former wars people talked about “soldier’s heart” (after the Civil War)

or “shell shock” (after World War I) –

and as far back as Herodotus,

historians noted that warriors who fought in particularly bloody battles
could be traumatized at higher rates than usual.

David was a general.

He had been in plenty of difficult battles.

“You have made your people see hard things;
you have given us wine to drink that makes us stagger.”

The one other place in the Bible that speaks of the wine of staggering
is Isaiah 51:17-23.

“Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath,
who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.”

Isaiah speaks of the desolation of war.

“devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you?
Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street
like an antelope in a net;
they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.”

And Isaiah says that those who have been brutalized by war,
are like those who are drunk and reeling with wine.

“Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine:
Thus says your Lord, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people:
‘Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;
the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;
and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors...’”

Who are these tormentors?

“those who have said to you,
‘Bow down, that we may pass over’;
and you have made your back like the ground
and like the street for them to pass over.”

The image is that of the people of God being literally trampled by the nations.

Picture, if you will, a street made up of people lying flat on the ground –
with an army marching over them!

After being trampled by the enemy,
after seeing the devastation and desolation of the marauding armies of your enemies,
no doubt you too would be reeling and staggering!

Isaiah 51 promises that the cup of God’s wrath will be handed next to your enemies.

(Jeremiah 25 does the same thing with the image of the cup of wrath.

Jerusalem must drink it first –
but then all the nations must drink as well.

Psalms 60 moves a lot quicker from image to image,

so rather than talk any more about the cup,

David moves immediately to the image of the banner.

Verse 4 says:

⁴ *You have set up a banner for those who fear you,
that they may flee to it from the bow.*^[b] *Selah*

What is a banner?

In Numbers 21, the brazen serpent was a *banner* which the people should look to in order to be saved.

In Numbers 26, Korah and his rebellion was swallowed up by the earth as a “banner” to warn others.

In Isaiah 11, “the root of Jesse” stands as a “banner” to the peoples – a “banner” for the nations that assembles the outcasts of Israel.

Isaiah often uses the word to refer to the signal flag that tells the army where to go or what to do – generally you “rally to the flag!” – you go to the king’s standard (either in forward action, or in retreat).

What is the banner that God has raised for Israel?

Just imagine the people of God, being trampled by the marauding army – the people of God reeling from the cup of God’s wrath that they have drunk –

but then they hear the trumpet sound – the *shofar*’s blast!

And they look, and they see the banner of the king unfurled!

2. “Give Salvation by Your Right Hand”: When God’s Answers (v5-8)

Because in Psalm 60, precisely at this moment, there is a shift in tone.

It appears that the Hebrew originally said, “answer *me*” (singular) in verse 5.

This is a little perplexing because verses 1-4 are all plural (“us”).

But then again, in verse 4, we are told that God has established his *banner*.

What is God’s banner?

God’s banner is the one who now speaks in verse 5:

⁵ *That your beloved one may be delivered,
give salvation by your right hand and answer me!*

In verse 5, the word “your beloved one” is actually singular!

Do remember Solomon’s other name? (the one God gave him?)

Jedidiah – which means ‘beloved of the LORD’.

Verse 5 reads, “that Jedidekah” (the beloved one of the LORD) may be delivered.

Is this, in fact, a prayer for Solomon?

Is David praying that *his* triumphs will bring peace for his son?

Or is the “beloved one” Israel (as the plural translation in the ESV argues)?

When you see the connection between David and Israel in the Psalms,
you begin to see that *both* are in view.

David recognizes that all his triumphs thus far do not bring security to God’s people.
Indeed, David’s successes thus far
 only paint a bright red target on Solomon – on Israel!
The surrounding nations are not used to Israel being on top –
 and so the only way for God’s kingdom to come,
 the only way for God’s salvation to rest upon his people,
 is for David to establish his supremacy over the nations!

And so he recounts what God has said “in his holiness”:

⁶ *God has spoken in his holiness [or, in his sanctuary]:*

*“With exultation I will divide up Shechem
 and portion out the Vale of Succoth.*

⁷ *Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine;*

*Ephraim is my helmet;
 Judah is my scepter.*

In verses 6-7 God speaks of his own land.

 Shechem is on the west side of the Jordan – in the land of Manasseh.

 The Vale of Succoth is on the east side of the Jordan – in the land of Gilead.

 These are the first two places where Jacob came,
 when he returned to the promised land, after his sojourn in Aram.

 God’s point is that both the west side and the east side of the Jordan are his.

Gilead is mine (the east side of the Jordan).

 Manasseh is mine (the west side of the Jordan).

 Ephraim is my helmet (the northern part of the land);

 Judah is my scepter (the southern part of the land).

Verse 6 uses the same term as 2 Samuel 8:2 – to “measure” or “portion out.”

 Just as David had “measured” Moab,

 so now God says that he “measures” the Vale of Succoth –
 which was the border between Gilead (Israelite territory)
 and the Ammonites.

Verse 7 then speaks of Ephraim as God’s helmet, and Judah as his scepter,
language reminiscent of Jacob’s blessing of his sons.

Now, remember, that verse 4 speaks of God setting up a banner –
a royal standard that will draw the beleaguered people of Israel together,
when they are being trampled by their enemies.

We often think of the reign of David as “the glory days” of Israel.
After all, David triumphed over all his enemies, right?

Well, yes.

But that would be like saying that 1914-1918 and 1939-1945
were the glory days of Great Britain and the US –
because they triumphed over their enemies in WWI and WWII.

Those were not the glory days.
Those were the *gory* days!

If David wrote this about the time of 2 Samuel 8,
then he is writing this for people who are war-weary –
for an army laden with PTSD!

And he’s reminding them of the banner that God has erected:
the anointed king to whom God has promised the land.

Jesus is our king.

Jesus is our banner – the one whom God has held up as the signal of hope.
Have you been trampled by the world?
Have you been under the assault of the devil?
Have you forgotten whose kingdom this is?

Remember that God has spoken in his holiness – in his holy sanctuary –
“Mine is Gilead; mine Manasseh” –
and not only that, but mine is all the earth!

Verse 8 then turns to God’s attitude toward the surrounding nations:

⁸ *Moab is my washbasin;
upon Edom I cast my shoe;
over Philistia I shout in triumph.*”

Moab is my washbasin (literally, ‘pot for washing’).

What on earth does this mean?

If it wasn’t *Moab* that we are talking about, I would say,
plainly it refers to some sort of ceremonial washing.

Upon Edom I cast my shoe.

Throwing your shoe at someone has always been an insult in the middle east
(as George W. Bush discovered when a reporter threw his shoe at him!).
But the idea of throwing your shoe has more to do with dominance than with pure insult.
You are claiming a certain supremacy when you throw your shoe at them.

Over Philistia I shout in triumph.

Literally, the Hebrew reads, “over me, Philistia, shout in triumph.”
Now Psalm 108 takes several verses over almost verbatim from Psalm 60,
and since Psalm 108 says “over Philistia I shout in triumph,
most translations simply adopt the text from Psalm 108,
and argue that someone just botched the text here.
But that’s not what Psalm 60 says!

Psalm 60 says, “over me [or perhaps, “because of me”], Philistia,
shout in triumph” [or perhaps “shout for joy”].

I’ll admit that this is very odd.

I sympathize with the translators and wish that I could follow them!
But I have a hard time seeing why any Hebrew scribe would ever make this mistake!
The Israelites never wanted the Philistines to shout for joy!
So the only way that this one works is if God inspired David to say it!

Still, I think that it is safe to say that David is *not* hoping
that the Philistines will defeat him in battle!

Rather, he is reporting God’s declared purpose
that Philistia will shout for joy because of God’s victory over them!

In other words, it is a *good thing for Philistia*
for David to reign over them.

Indeed, some of the early Fathers, who also tried to take the text seriously on this point,
argue that the whole Psalm should be read as a song of the *pagan nations*
crying out for God to deliver them by the hand of David.

They argue that it is the Edomites and Philistines who have been rejected by God,
and they are pleading with God to save them – *through* David!

I can’t go all the way on that one,
but they were on to something!

“Moab is my washpot” is not a negative.

Moab is not my scepter – that’s Judah.

Moab is not my helmet – that’s Ephraim.

But Moab is my washbasin – where I am ritually cleansed.

Over Edom I toss my shoe – and so Edom will come under the rule of the kingdom of God.

And even the Philistines will sing for joy when David triumphs!

And that's not as far-fetched as it may sound.

After all, remember how many *Gittites* are in David's administration!

If David has many Philistine supporters,

perhaps it suggests an internal split among the Philistines,

some of whom have rallied to David's banner,

so that David's triumph brings joy to his Philistine allies.

We know from human history that factions regularly break off from one group,
and ally with their erstwhile enemies

in order to bring down the "wrongful" rulers of their country.

We know from 1-2 Samuel that such a faction of Gittites existed.

In other words, as David addresses his tired, shell-shocked army,

as he sings to them of God's promises,

he reminds them their triumph will result in the well-being of the nations.

David cites the divine promise from the sanctuary

as the reason why God should now go with his army to Edom.

Remember your promises, O Lord!

We also live in between the promise and its fulfillment.

Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church.

Jesus promised that he would be with us unto the end of the age.

As we go into battle, fighting against the world, the flesh and the devil,

we go, knowing that the triumph of Jesus in the life of each person we meet,

will be good for them!

They will shout for joy when King Jesus finally conquers them,

and subdues them to his will!

The final stanza pleads with God to help now as Israel marches toward Bozra,
the fortified city – the capital of Edom.

3. Who Will Lead Me if You Do Not? When God Tramples (v9-12)

David speaks again in the singular in verse 9:

⁹ *Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?*

If God is to throw his shoe over Edom,
then David needs God to lead him to Edom!

But there is a problem!
Because the reign of David was not a walk in the park.
If you had actually lived through the years of David's life,
you would *not* have said that this was the "golden age"!

As David says in verse 10:

¹⁰ *Have you not rejected us, O God?
You do not go forth, O God, with our armies.*

David remembers how it was when a single stone struck Goliath in the forehead,
and all the Philistines turned tail and fled!

With Arameans and Moabites, and Edomites and Philistines –
this isn't as easy as it seemed on that glorious day in the valley of Elah!

Year after year, we go out to battle –
to hold off the enemies of the LORD –
to establish the kingdom of God!

But quite frankly, we don't seem to be getting anywhere!

Do you know that feeling?
In your struggle with sin, does it seem like your treading water?
You look back over the last fifteen years,
and you are no more the man of God than you were then?

Day after day – month after month – year after year –
the same old fight, and you don't seem to be getting any closer!

¹¹ *Oh, grant us help against the foe,
for vain is the salvation of man!*
¹² *With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.*

We need the Divine Warrior to go before us.
By ourselves, we are helpless!

Even together – the whole lot of us – are helpless!
It's not enough to have good 'fellowship' – if fellowship simply means hanging out!

Even David recognizes that *he* is not enough.
I may be your pastor – God may have called me to shepherd you and care for you.
But I cannot defeat your enemies!

My job is to remind you who can.

*With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.*

As Paul said to the Romans,
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. (Romans 16:20)

We must march out to battle –
a weak and pitiful looking army, though we be!
We must march because that is what God uses –
not our strength and power;
not our might in battle –
but our faith – believing that God will do what he has promised,
and so therefore we will be where God tells us to be!

We may have PTSD –
we may have seen hard things,
we may have drunk the wine of staggering –
but Christ is the banner – he is the standard to which we are called.