

The King Speaks Part I

The Right Hand of God

Psalm 108:1 "A Song. A Psalm of David. My heart is steadfast,
O God! I will sing and make melody with all my being!
2 Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!
3 I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples; I will sing
praises to you among the nations.
4 For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness
reaches to the clouds.
5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the
earth!
6 That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right
hand and answer me!
7 God has promised in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up
Shechem and portion out the Valley of Succoth.
8 Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my
scepter.
9 Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I
shout in triumph."
10 Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?
11 Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go out, O God, with
our armies.
12 Oh grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!
13 With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes.

Psalm 109:1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.*
Be not silent, O God of my praise!

2 For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking
against me with lying tongues.
3 They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause.
4 In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer.
5 So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love.
6 Appoint a wicked man against him; **let** an accuser stand at his right
hand.
7 When he is tried, **let** him come forth guilty; **let** his prayer be counted
as sin!
8 **Let** his days be few; **let** another take his office!
9 **Let** his children be fatherless and his wife a widow!
10 **Let** his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the
ruins they inhabit!
11 **Let** the creditor seize all that he has; **let** strangers plunder the fruits
of his toil!
12 **Let** there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his
fatherless children!
13 **Let** his posterity be cut off; **let** his name be blotted out in the second
generation!
14 **Let** the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and
let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!
15 **Let** them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the
memory of them from the earth!
16 For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and
needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death.
17 He loved to curse; **let** curses come upon him! He did not delight in
blessing; may it be far from him!
18 He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body
like water, like oil into his bones!
19 **Let** it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he
puts on every day!
20 **Let** this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, of those who
speak evil against my life!
21 But you, O GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name's sake;
because your steadfast love is good, deliver me!

- 22 For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me.
23 I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust.
24 My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat.
25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads.
26 Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love!
27 **Let** them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it!
28 **Let** them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad!
29 **Let**¹ my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak!
30 With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the midst of the throng.
31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.

(Ps 108-109)

A Frightful Captivity

It's around 600 BC, 2,700 long years ago. He is a Jew living in tumultuous times. 120 years earlier, his great grandfather watched from a distance as the worst 20-year span in his country's long history unfolded before his eyes. The northern tribes had been brutally occupied in a one-sided war by led by **Tiglath-Pileser**, the Assyrian tyrant. A short

¹ I've changed the "may" in vv. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 29 to "let" (following the NAS) for the sake of seeing the pattern better.

while later, many were deported by his successors **Sargon** and **Sennacherib**. They were led away into captivity in a faraway land, resulting in the famous 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Mercifully, God spared his family living in the south in Judah.

But now, the Assyrian has been conquered by the mightier Babylonian—king **Nebuchadnezzar**. The once super-power to the south, Egypt, has fallen to the same. And he has set his eyes upon the Holy City, the City of David, with its great temple and treasures. The great king enters the city and razes it, completely destroying everything in sight. The man watches as his family is slaughtered before his eyes, his religion crumbles to the ground, and his thoughts turn to the prophets who spoke for decades about this impending disaster, all for the sins of rebelling against the Only True Great King—Yahweh, the Living God. Shackled and chained, he is marched off to Babylon with nothing left. His doom is complete.

The story is repeated in a million families, and their cries go up to God as they remember their once glorious past—their **kings**, **their exodus**, **their law**, their **temple**. Nonstop lamentation lasts for decades, until the remarkable day when

the newest world-power, the Persians, led by **Cyrus the Great** orders a reversal of fortunes. “**The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah**” (**Ezra 1:2**).

It is now more than 200 years since that initial captivity of the North. Cyrus is dead, but this legacy of religious toleration has continued with **Artaxerxes**. Nehemiah, the cupbearer to this famous king (**Neh 2:1**), is sent back to Israel to oversee the rebuilding of the temple wall. He arrives in Jerusalem where he and the great reformer Ezra collaborate on further reforms for the people. Chief among them, as always ought to be, was **the reformation of Israel’s worship**.

The following reconstruction is speculative, but based on scholarly studies trying to figure out the logic of the Psalter. “**How can we help the people never to do this again?**” “**How can we remind them of where they have come from, for people are fickle and they soon forget the past.**” These are questions I imagine them asking.

Suddenly, Ezra has an idea. The great psalms of Israel’s past have all been memorized by him and the other priests, who refused to let their religion go even without a temple

or city or land. They begin asking each other questions. “What was the yearning of our hearts in Babylon?” “The monarchy,” the younger Nehemiah replies. “We remembered those great days gone by when we were free, and the reign of God was visible to all the world because he blessed his servant David.” “The exodus,” Ezra adds. “God saved them then, won’t he do it again now?” “Torah,” Nehemiah nods silently. We broke God’s law and he sent us away into captivity. “The temple!” they both shout together. It’s been rebuilt, but nothing compares to the glory of the original.

Ezra proclaims, “Yes. Then that’s how it will be done. We will create a hymnbook to end all hymnbooks. A collection for the ages. This is how our people will remember the past forever. And they will do it worshiping God in his temple, just as he commanded.” Soon thereafter, the compilation of this great book began in the priestly chambers of the newly rebuilt temple. No one knows how long the work took, but it is into this context that we now turn to our Psalms.

A Symmetrical Order

This climactic book, the last of the five books that make up the glorious Psalter of the Bible, began last week with a song helping Israel to remember its return from Babylon. Appropriate, for what we have just thought about. Today, we enter into **two weeks looking at Psalms of David (Ps 108-110)**. The Monarchy. After this, there are several songs called the **Egyptian Hallelujahs (113-118)** which are preceded by a couple of alphabet songs (**111-112**). The great song about the **Law (119)** is followed by **temple** songs of ascent (**120-134**), which are followed by more David songs (138-145). This creates the following pattern behind why these songs are where they are:

Psalms 108-110 Psalms of David (monarchy)

 Psalms 113-118 Egyptian Hallel (exodus)

 Psalm 119 Torah

 Psalms 120-134 (137) Songs of Ascent, plus appendix (Zion)

Psalms 138-145 Psalms of David (monarchy)²

² **William P. Brown** (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 359. He writes, “**Note that the collections in Book V represent major dimensions of Israel’s pre-exilic life. Recalling the exodus is the collection usually known as the Egyptian Hallel (113-118; see especially 114:1 and 118:14, which quotes Ex 15:2); recalling the centrality of Zion is the collection of the Songs of Ascent (120-134; see especially 122, 126, 132-134); and recalling the crucial role of the Davidic monarchy are the two collections attributed to David (108-110;**

Psalm 108: Coda

I find this interesting, but why it is important (to me, anyway) is best seen we come to Psalm 108. Why? **Psalm 108 is unique** in that it is one psalm composed entirely of words that are not original to it. In fact, it takes two earlier songs and basically adds nothing else of its own. In this way, the song acts like a kind of **coda** from earlier in the Davidic part of the Psalter.

The song begins with **the superscription: *A Song. A Psalm of David.*** What it means is that all of its words come *from* David, but it is really its own psalm taken from two earlier songs of David (see chart below).

The first five verses are taken from **Psalm 57:7-11**, which are the last five verses of that song. The original superscription was the much longer, “*To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled*

138-145). Undoubtedly, in the post-exilic era, there were people who longed for a deliverance from Persian domination that would match the exodus from Egyptian oppression, and there were people who longed for an expected a revival of the Davidic monarchy. The temple was rebuilt on Zion, and it functioned again after 515 [BC] as a place of worship and destination for pilgrims. ... But the overwhelmingly dominant structural feature of Book V is the massive Psalm 118, a Torah psalm in which the word *tora* occurs twenty-five times, along with several synonyms also repeated numerous times. Its length alone—176 verses—makes it stand out, but there are other considerations as well.”

from Saul, in the cave.” But this one does not have that original context in mind. Instead, it is re-appropriating David’s original thoughts for this newer post-exilic purpose.

The last eight verses are taken from the last eight verses of **Psalm 60 (5-12)**. It also had a very long superscription (perhaps the longest in the Psalter): *“To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth. A Miktam 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” (Ps 60:1)*.

(Ps 108:1-5)	(Ps 57:7-11)
<p>"A Song. A Psalm of David.</p> <p>My heart is steadfast, O God!</p> <p>I will sing and make melody with all my being!</p>	<p>"To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave."</p> <p>⁷ My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast!</p> <p>I will sing and make melody!</p>
<p>² Awake, O harp and lyre!</p> <p>I will awake the dawn!</p>	<p>⁸ Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre!</p> <p>I will awake the dawn!</p>
<p>³ I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.</p>	<p>⁹ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.</p>
<p>⁴ For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.</p>	<p>¹⁰ For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.</p>
<p>⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!"</p>	<p>¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!"</p>

Ps 108:6-13	Ps 60:5-12
⁶ That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer me!	⁵ That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!
⁷ God has promised in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Valley of Succoth.	⁶ God has spoken in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth.
⁸ Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter.	⁷ Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter.
⁹ Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph."	⁸ Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph."
¹⁰ Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?	⁹ Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?
¹¹ Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go out, O God, with our armies.	¹⁰ Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go forth, O God, with our armies.
¹² Oh grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!	¹¹ Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!
¹³ With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes."	¹² With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes."

So why would anyone want to do this? The answer really only seems to be found in realizing that this is part of the reform after the return of the exiles. The priests wanted the people to remember [David](#) at this point! And if this section of songs is, as I brought up last time, part of a liturgy sung during the Passover week, and part of a larger book that helps us see [The Return of the King](#), then its order and

purpose would help the Jews remember their past, while looking towards the future.

In that idea, Psalm 108 is a morning psalm (“Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn”; vs. 2) sung on the 16th of Nisan when the Israelites are fleeing Egypt and come to a place called Succoth in the desert before the Red Sea:

Passover Liturgy				
Based on Ex 12:16; Deut 16:1-8; Ezra 1-6, and Modern Jewish Practice ³				
Nisan (month)	Exodus Event/Place	Exodus Reference	Psalm	
			Evening	Morning
15th	Passover in Egypt (Rameses)	12:6-10	105	106
16th	Succoth	12:37	107	108
17th	Etham	13:20	109	110
18th	Pi-hahiroth	14:1	111	112
19th	Pharaoh sends army/Pillars of Cloud and Fire/Sea Divided	14:21	113	114
20th	Crossing the Sea/Egyptians drowned	14:24-25	115	116
21st	Song of the Sea	15:1	117	118

The song can be divided into these two halves, but those don't perfectly correspond to the two songs it is taken from. Rather, you have vv. 1-7 form a half, vv. 8-13 for the second half, so that it looks like this:

³ Goulder, 192-95. The modern Jewish practice of the Feast of Unleavened Bread reads Ex 12:21-51 on the first day; Ex 13:1-16 on the third day, the Red Sea story, Ex 13:17-15:26 on the seventh day. Tractate Sopherim has Psalm 114 to be sung on the seventh day.

Prelude (108:1) A song; a psalm of David (108:1)

A (108:2-3) I will sing and chant praise (108:2)

B (108:4-7) Help with your right hand and answer us that your loved ones may escape (108:7)

A' (108:8-10) God promised in the sanctuary (108:8)

B' (108:11-13) Give us aid against the foe; worthless is human help (108:13)⁴

Seeing this helps you make sense of how these two passages now work together to form one new song of David. The people are returning to Israel, and they are at the temple, singing anew these songs. But now, their minds are thinking about their own past. Let's look at the song in more detail.

They sing together, “**My heart is steadfast, O God**” (**Ps 108:1**) Meaning, they are **stayed on Jehovah**. They are not going to wander away again to the gods of the nations. This is a vital reminder to a people who were sent into captivity for just this reason.

“**Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!**” (**2**). The reference here to **the morning** makes it a perfect fit for a song sung during the morning worship of the great national feast.

⁴ http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19_Psalms_pericope_e.html

“I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations” (3). This is **not silent worship**. It is **not private worship**. It is public, in front of the world, so that they will know that we worship the LORD. This is a word badly needed in our day of privatized religion, which is the exact opposite of Christianity. We worship God in the midst of a world, gathering together without shame of our great God.

Why? “For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (4). With *hesed* as the major theme of this part of Book V (remember, it was the first and last word of the previous song), we tell God how thankful we are because he has come to us in covenant and will not forsake his word. He is faithful, and his faithfulness extends as far as the eye can see, up to heaven itself.

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!” (5). In this way, the steadfast hearts of the people are affirming that they worship no other god. Rather, they desire for God’s glory to extend throughout his creation, even into the realm of the heavenly beings, so that he might be worshiped as King of kings and God of

gods. This is a declaration that **we will have no other god before us.**

Again, why? “**That your beloved ones may be delivered**” (6a). In other words, **there is no other God capable of saving.** This has just been proven by the fact that they have returned again to the Promised Land. He has saved them from exile. And now, yet again proving his covenant love, he is once more being kind to his people. And thus, whatever should befall them, they can believe that God will deliver them.

How? “**Give salvation by your right hand and answer me!**” **The Right Hand!** “The Right Hand” appears in all three of these songs of David, and for very good reason. The song is messianic. Jesus, The Word of God, who prior to the incarnation was the **Commander of the Armies of God (Josh 5:13-14)**, as is the job of the right hand, is now, after his ascension, seated at the right hand of the Father in heavenly places as the God-man (**Act 7:55; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20**; etc.).

Curiously, it is at this very moment, when the Right Hand of God is mentioned that Psalm 56 ends and Psalm 60 begins. I think this is important, because it means that the Psalmist here is seeing a connection between the Right hand

of Psalm 56 and what the Right Hand God does in Psalm 60. It starts off saying, “God has promised in his holiness...” (Ps 108:7). A promise is something you swear about the future. Yet, curiously, what it now seems to remember is something from the past.

“With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine...” (7-8a). Shechem, Succoth, and Gilead are all places that were in the land of Canaan before Abraham arrived. But they also happen to be the three places, in order, that Jacob went to on his way back to Canaan after serving his uncle. Someone notices, “He arrived at Gilead first [Gen 31:21], then Succoth [Gen 33:17], and finally Shechem [Gen 33:18], where tragedy befell his family.”⁵

The song continues, “... Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet” (Ps 108:8b). Manasseh and Ephraim are the two sons of Joseph, not original to the twelve sons of Jacob. “Judah is my scepter” (8c). A scepter belongs to a king, thus the messiah would come out of this line, as of course Jesus did. In mentioning these three tribes, Judah (which is often

⁵ Christine Miller, “Psalm 108 Patterns” <http://www.alittleperspective.com/psalm-108-patterns/>.

shorthand for the southern kingdom) and Ephraim (which is often shorthand for the northern kingdom) and Manasseh, which had land on both sides of the Jordan represents the totality of God's people, and with the imagery of a helmet and scepter, God is going to do battle again in the land that was his even before the Patriarchs came into it. This battle will be carried out *by The Right Hand!* It is prophetic of Messiah. Thus speaks the king.

“*Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph*” (9). These three nations are classical enemies of Israel for most of the OT history. Curiously, the only time these three tribes were united as a nation and that these three enemies were in subjection to Israel was during the reigns of David and Solomon. In other words, the song is deliberately reminding Israel of where they have come from, the heights that God brought them to through his servant David. Something like that will now happen in the future.

In this light it now asks, “*Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go out, O God, with our armies. Oh grant us help against the foe, for vain is the*

salvation of man!” (10-12). So, you are newly arrived after the exile to your land. What could be more important than remembering all the past times when it seemed like God had forgotten you? Even when he had given you into the hand of your enemies?

If this is the original context into which Psalm 108 comes to us, it certainly teaches us the importance of remembering the past. But what else can this song teach us today? The last verse reads, “With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes” (13). Combine this now with the messianic thoughts earlier, and we see that in fact, in Christ, God is conquering his foes again. He is doing it in two ways. He is saving some of them, turning them to repentance and faith. This is the unexpected conquering of Moab and Edom. However, he will judge others of them, saying, “Judgment is mine. I will avenge.” This is the work of the Right Hand, the one who has come down to earth to—as David himself prayed—delivered and save his people. In this way, our orientation is focused on the king, on David and his royal line, which is what it needs to be for us to properly understand the next two songs.

Psalm 109: Imprecation

We do not have time to mine all of the riches of Psalm 110 today, so we will save that one for next time, as a kind of Part II to this idea that here in these three songs, **the King is speaking to his Right Hand**. Psalm 109 is “*To the choirmaster. (“For the End”). A Psalm of David.*” Its content is striking in light of Psalm 108. It is **an imprecatory psalm**, sung perhaps **in the evening** (see **vs. 23**, “**I am gone like a shadow at evening**”) as the darkness of night descends at the end of the day. Its theme is very dark indeed. In fact, someone has called it, “**The most shocking psalm in the Psalter, the pure vitriol of distilled hatred.**”⁶

In preparation for this part of the sermon, I was listening to a sermon by our friend James Adams who did his dissertation on the imprecatory psalms.⁷ He brought together some quotes from usually solid scholars on the nature of imprecatory psalms. One says, “**These psalms are not the oracles of God**” (meaning, that God used the words

⁶ **Michael D. Goulder**, *The Psalms of the Return (Book V, Psalms 107-150)*, 132.

⁷ **James E. Adams**, “Praying the War Psalms as Spiritual Warfare,” uploaded to Youtube Aug 1, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5IL9Ursaag>. His dissertation is distilled into the book *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace: Lessons from the Imprecatory Psalms* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1991).

of men for his purposes, but they are not God's words).⁸ *Halley's Bible Handbook* says that these OT words were for expedience sake where God accommodated to us in men's ideas. But in the NT, God used his own ideas.⁹ C. S. Lewis apparently at one point called them "Devilish" and "diabolical" with "hatred ... festering, gloating, and undisguised."¹⁰

A great problem with scripture like this is that we just don't know how to deal properly with it. It is so against their understanding of God that it seems better to some to just chock them off as the blathering emotional knee-jerk reactions of sinful people. But this is to do them terrible injustice.

What is before us in this song is vital to get right. But only when you read them the right way can you do this. That way is explained to you by the New Testament itself, which uses imprecations all the time and shows us how to deal with these psalms in the way God intended.

⁸ Peter Craigie, *New International Critical Commentary*, quoted by Adams.

⁹ Paraphrasing from Adams.

¹⁰ Again from Adams.

There are echoes of this song in John 17 where Jesus prays, “While I was with them, I kept them in your Name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12). Our Psalm says, “In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love” (Ps 109:4-5). You can hear it again in vv. 7-8, “When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another take his office.” This last verse is directly quoted by Acts 1:20 of referring to Judas! Listen to how it puts it. “Now this man [Judas] acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language *Akeldama*, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’ [Ps 69:25]; and ‘let another take his office’” (Acts 1:18-20).

It isn’t just Judas, but the event that Judas’ betrayal led to is found in this song. The song sings, “I am an object of

scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads” (Ps 109:25). At the cross we read in two Gospels, “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads” (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29).

When you read OT commentaries, many of them try to think of what the original audience would have thought. “Who could be saying the things that stand before us now?” they ask. This isn’t a bad question, I suppose, until you conclude the reading hearing virtually nothing about what we just talked about. Some will suggest that this is an unknown person who is having a really bad day. Others will say that David is used here to represent the people at the time of the exile who may have been thinking about their time in Babylon (I’m not totally opposed to this idea).

But it is just here that we have to understand the **superscription**. *A Psalm of David*. Beloved, this is about the King speaking. That’s its main purpose. It is to orient your thinking toward *the king* and *his words*. Certainly, their Jewish minds would have gone backward in time when they thought about David. But could they not also have gone forward? That’s how we are taught to read it by the Apostles, so let’s take a look at this extraordinary song.

Its structure is probably chiastic, with the “just desserts” (if you will) of the wicked person being its center.

Preface (109:1a) For the leader. A psalm of David (109:1)

A (1b) Do not be silent, O God of my praise (109:1)

B (2-5) They repay me evil for good, hatred for my love. My enemies say of me (109:5)

C (6-7) Find a lying witness, an accuser to stand by his right hand (6)

D (8-19) May his posterity be destroyed, his name cease in the next generation (13)

C' (20-21) May the LORD bring this upon my accusers, who speak evil against me (20)

B' (22-29) Though they curse, may you bless; shame my foes, I will rejoice (28)

A' (30-31) I will give fervent thanks to the LORD; before all I will praise my God (30)¹¹

After the superscription, David begins singing. “**Be not silent, O God of my praise!**” (**Ps 109:1**). This fits perfectly with what we have just ended with: God doing valiantly in the future by treading down our foes. This idea continues here. “**For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues**” (2). It gets worse. “**They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me**

¹¹ http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19_Psalms_pericope_e.html. Another attempt is Christine Miller, “Psalm 109: Overlapping Structures,” *alittleperspective*, <http://www.alittleperspective.com/psalm-109-overlapping-structures/>. As you can see, this attempt has two chiasms, not one.

Introduction) Ps 109:1, O God of my praise, Do not keep silent;

a) 109:2 Wicked speaking evil against me;

b) 109:3-5, attackers attack him with accusations:

c) **109:6-15, Let his own works come upon him:**

c') **109:16-19, Because they are the works he did to the vulnerable, without mercy:**

b') 109:20a, Let this be the Lord's reward to my accusers;

a') 109:20b, To those who speak evil against my person.

a) 109:16-20, Mercy not shown to the needy, therefore may his own cursing cover him:

b) **Ps 109:21a, But You, O GOD the Lord, Deal with me for Your name's sake**

a) 109:21b-29, Deliver the needy by Your mercy, and may shame cover the accusers

Conclusion) Ps 109:30-31, Praise to God who does not keep silent

without cause” (3). This is one of those verses echoed in Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer about himself!

In other words, whatever this may mean to someone individually or to Israel corporately, ultimately, **the singer is Jesus**. This is the key point to never forget with all the psalms, but especially the imprecatory songs. Let me put it a different way. People desperately want the Psalms to all be about them. This makes it feel like we are applying it properly if we can go away saying, “OK, this is how I feel!” In fact, this song can be about you (Paul actually applies **vs. 28** in **1Co 4:12**). But first and foremost, this isn’t about you at all. It is about the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the only one who can fully say, “**they attack me without cause.**” Yes, evil men go after the innocent. But Jesus is Pure Innocence, having never done a single thing wrong to anyone.

“**In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love**” (4-5). Again, the High Priestly Prayer. What does Jesus do? He shows perfect love to his disciples. This includes most importantly—Judas. **Jesus loved Judas!** That’s what both of these verses teach. In exchange? Judas accused

Jesus before the Jews, betraying him. Judas repaid perfect love with total hate. As a reward for his kindness, Jesus gets crucified. Literally. Jesus' response is not to blast down fire from heaven to consume him. Rather, it is to bring this great evil before the throne of his Father in prayer, even as he is doing in that High Priestly Prayer in John 17. This is the proper way to handle anger at such evil.

At this point in the song, we have perhaps its most important feature. It is a move from recalling past deeds to a courtroom. “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin!” (6-7). Why is this important? Because this is not the song of a vigilante, an outlaw, a miscreant, a desperado, or a man seeking personal revenge. It is a song about taking an evil person before the highest possible court in order to receive a just trial from the Judge. This puts everything into a very different perspective than people usually have when reading these kinds of songs.

The person in view is evil, truly evil. But what is the meaning of sending a wicked man and an “accuser” on him? Spurgeon has some good thoughts:

“*Set thou a wicked man over him.*” What worse punishment could a man have? The proud man cannot endure the proud ... The righteous in their patience find the rule of the wicked a sore bondage; but those who are full of resentful passions, and haughty aspirations, are slaves indeed when men of their own class have the whip hand of them ... what retribution could be more just? What unrighteous man can complain if he finds himself governed by one of like character? What can the wicked expect but that their rulers should be like themselves? ... “*And let Satan stand at his right hand*” [“accuser” is the word ‘*satan*’]. Should not like come to like? Should not the father of lies stand near his children? Who is a better right-hand friend for an adversary of the righteous than the great adversary himself? The curse is an awful one, but it is most natural that it should come to pass: those who serve Satan may expect to have his company, his assistance, his temptations, and at last his doom.¹²

Satan’s role in the Scripture is that he is the accuser in the divine council of heaven. He *was* the accuser of the brothers (**Rev 12:10**), but he *remains* the accuser of those who have

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, vol. 4 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 439.

no defense attorney save themselves. What is being asked for here then is **justice**. It is what God gave Israel when that wicked nation was taken over by the Assyrian and later by the Babylonian. It is what God brought up Judas after Satan entered him and he betrayed God. Justice is God's way, save when the Gospel goes out for salvation. People get what they deserve. That's justice. As is the thought that his own prayer comes from his wicked heart and therefore is to be counted itself as sinful nor righteous. He can plead all he wants to God to save him on that day, but if he would not trust in Christ, his prayer is wickedness itself.

At this point, a series of imprecations unmatched perhaps in all the Bible unfold. In the NAS, eight verses in a row begin "**Let...**" (in our ESV, it is "let" and "may," the difference is not significant). "Let" becomes a kind of macabre, repeating chorus of this song. Going with the NAS for sake of ease:

- **Let** his days be few; **Let** another take his office. (vs. 8)
- **Let** his children be fatherless, and [let] his wife a widow. (9)
- **Let** his children wander about and beg; and **let** them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes. (10)

- **Let** the creditor seize all that he has; and **let** strangers plunder the product of his labor. (11)
- **Let** there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, nor [let] any to be gracious to his fatherless children. (12)
- **Let** his prosperity be cut off; in a following generation **let** their name be blotted out. (13)
- **Let** the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and do not **let** the sin of his mother be blotted out. (14)
- **Let** them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off their memory from the earth. (15)

Essentially, you have over a dozen “lets” that are explicit, with more that are implied. And **they are brutal**. This is the reason why people don’t know what to do with this song. How can it be God’s word?

Let me give a few things to think about here. The first thing perhaps to understand is that, again, this is justice. What that means here is that God is perfectly right to dispense justice. **Too many of us presume that God must show grace**. That’s why this language is so hard to hear. But to do this is to turn everything, including the word “grace,”

on its head. Grace is not getting what you deserve. But justice is getting exactly what you deserve. And this is exactly what the wicked who do this to anyone (but especially to Christ) deserve!

Again, the great villain of the NT—Judas—is called out by name by Luke. “**May another take his office.**” Judas is the one “**doomed to destruction**” in the NT. The point is that in reading his life, seeing how he flattered people, obviously made many political alliances, was quick to take control of the apostolic monies, but looked every bit the good-guy even to the very last hour at the Last Supper to all his friends, this is nevertheless the face of evil. True evil is sheer hypocrisy, fakery on the outside, complete disconnect on the inside. Examine what Judas is like in *all* the NT and you will come to know evil. Suddenly, the horror movie image of evil doesn’t look quite right. It looks more like ... me and you than Freddy Kruger.

Perhaps you need to reorient your sensibilities to the Scripture rather than the culture. **Justice for the wicked extends to their family**: orphans and widows, not because God can’t stand them, but because the man has been put to death by the law. Wandering orphans begging on streets,

living in cardboard boxes because their daddy was a murderer. This is the devastation true evil creates.

It extends to his friends. Creditors that have no pity because he has constantly sought to steal from them and others. Thieves who take the fruit of his labor because that's what he did to others. No one who is kind to him or even to his kids, because he was kind to no one himself.

It extends to his name. Children that die young from foolishly following in their wicked father's footsteps. Grandchildren who do the same as the curse to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God comes to fruition. Pure remembrance of this evil by the LORD who will not forgive him on that great day. A mother who taught modeled her own iniquity to this wretched son of hers. A total cutting off of even the memory of this family from the lips and minds of men.

Am I making this up? No. **The courtroom scene continues,** "For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death. He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him! He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his

body like water, like oil into his bones!” (16-18). This is not a good man. But alas, there is no one good, no not one.

- **Let it be to him as a garment with which he covers himself, and for a belt with which he constantly girds himself. (19)**
- **Let this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, and of those who speak evil against my soul. (20)**

Do you hear the justice? He wears his curses of the weak and needy like a cloak, and therefore let it be the very clothing he takes with him to hell (“the reward”). This is unmitigated justice being asked for by the defendant before the very court of heaven. Anyone who has been wronged in any way can know the power of these emotions and how true it is that this is exactly what all men want when they are the one wronged, when they are not the one being judged.

But when it comes to us, **do not all men want mercy for themselves?** Certainly, any sane man does. They do not count themselves among the wicked. But God does. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They have the poison of vipers on their lips. Their feet are swift to shed blood. The way of*

peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes (all Romans 3).

It is at just this point that the song turns again. David cries out, “*But you, O GOD my Lord (Yahweh Adonai), deal on my behalf for your Name’s sake; because your steadfast love is good, deliver me!*” (Ps 109:21). *David does not want justice for himself.* But his cry is not a defense of his own goodness. Instead, it is a defense of God’s goodness give to him through a covenant promise of *hesed* love in Christ (the Name’s sake). This is what the righteous base their plea for mercy upon.

His disposition is very different from his enemy. “*For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me*” (22). He is not rich and wanting for nothing. He is poor; he has nothing. This is a heart cry, a heart that knows itself to be fragile and fleeing and full of sin. “*I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust*” (23).

A moment ago, I said “David,” because it is his song. Yet, we of course can also see Christ. “*My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat. I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads*” (24-25). This is Christ crying out in

his great passion! It is probably this image more than any other in the Bible that is responsible for the many depictions of Jesus on the cross wasting away as if he hadn't eaten in weeks. Certainly, the head-wagging is applied to him. Whether or not he hadn't eaten in days or weeks we don't know. But we do know from this the utter distress his soul was in during those final hours when he was pouring his heart out to God to take this cup from him. All because wicked men sought to trade his love for his life. Thus, he cries out, **“Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love!”**

Suddenly, the “lets” return for a third time:

- **Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it! (27)**
- **Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad! (28)**
- **Let my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak! (29)**

The main focus now is on **God's grace to his anointed**. Let them know that you have shown mercy to me! Let them

know that you have saved me! Let them know that I blessed you while they cursed you and you poured out kindness upon me! May this make them ashamed and full of dishonor knowing that they have rejected the Lord's Anointed. These are the words of the king; the words of the King!

Therefore, Psalm 109 is teaching you, through the words of the king, that there is **judgment or grace out there awaiting sinners**. Those who stay in their wicked paths, refusing the kindness of God in Christ dying on the cross for sin, will have retribution the likes of which they can't even dream of now. Nor will they want to. But it is coming. One of the things this song makes me remember is indeed that vengeance belongs to the LORD, he will repay. Therefore, like the psalmist, I will not divvy it out myself, but will pray for the court of heaven to do what is right when I am wronged.

When I do that, I can remember that even against my worst enemies, God may show them kindness through Christ. And that is what I hope and pray, and the Lord has taught us all to pray for our enemies and let their fate fall into the hands of the living God. My responsibility is that I tell them the Gospel, so that they may know. What is that

Gospel in this song? That Jesus Christ was treated viciously by those he showed love to. That his love was repaid with death. But that his death was of his own foreknowledge and accord, for he did this so that sinners who do not deserve mercy might know that God is merciful in Christ.

If you know him today, then you can sing the last two lines. If you do not, then please turn to him in the day of his mercy. And as we will see in Psalm 110, it is judgment is coming very soon. The king has spoken. Therefore, won't you say with David and all the saints, “**With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the mist of the throng. For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death**” (30-31).