

PSALM 60

A VICTORY SONG

The title of this Psalm tells us that David composed it “when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah.” An insult offered to his ambassadors by King Hanun of the Ammonites led to a serious war between them and Israel. Hanun obtained mercenaries from Syria to reinforce his army; and David’s generals, Joab and his brother Abishai, gave them battle. Joab gained the victory over the Syrians; and the Ammonites, seeing their allies defeated, fled into their city. But this defeat provoked a great coalition, involving all the people between the Jordan and Euphrates Rivers. David, however, fearlessly marched against them at the head of his army. He vanquished all his enemies and made himself master of the Aramaean kingdoms of Damascus, Zobah, and Hamath; and he also subjugated the Edomites through a terrible trouncing in the Valley of Salt.

In our own language, we possess many fine songs of patriotism. It would be impossible to overestimate the value of such songs as a means of keeping alive patriotic sentiments in the hearts of the people. What a treasure it would be if we had many more incidents from the great epochs of our history, embalmed in immortal verse and sung at every fireside! The Hebrews had their history thus set to music; and the poetical commentary on their national victories and failures reaches down to the very bottom of the meaning of those victories and failures, for it reads them in the light of eternal truth.

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This song has a lengthy title, but it helps us much to expound the Psalm: “To the chief musician upon Shushan-eduth” – that is, “the Lily of Testimony.” The 45th Psalm was “on the lilies”; and it pictured the Kingly Warrior, in His beauty, going forth to war. But here we see Him dividing the spoil, and bearing testimony to the glory of God.

We also find the word Michtam again. David obeyed the precept to teach the children of Israel; he recorded the Lord’s mighty acts so that they might be rehearsed in the ears of generations to come. Golden secrets are to be proclaimed from the housetops; these things were not done in a corner, and they ought not to be buried in silence. We should gladly learn what Divine inspiration so beautifully teaches us.

This Psalm was written when David “strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah.” The combined Aramean tribes sought to overcome Israel, but they were signally defeated. “When Joab returned” – he had been engaged in another region, and the enemies of Israel took advantage of his absence; but upon his return with Abishai, the fortunes of war were changed. They “smote of Edom in the valley of salt twelve thousand.” More than this appear to have fallen, according to 1 Chronicles 18:12; but this commemorates one memorable part of the conflict. Terrible must have been the battle, but decisive indeed were the results; and the power of the enemy was utterly broken. Well did the Lord deserve a song from His servant!

This song may be said to consist of three parts: the complaining verses (1-3), the gladsome (verses 4-8), and the prayerful (verses 9-12).

Verses 1-5 start off with a mournful note that comes from the depressed and discouraged spirit of the patriot-poet. The enemy had invaded his people's country; and the worst of the matter was that it was a triumph of the heathen over the people of the true God, to whom a banner of truth had been given so that they might publicly display it (verse 4). Our personal success or defeat is nothing, but the victory of the truth of Jehovah is everything!

In verses 6-8, the Psalmist recalls to mind the Lord's promises and a change comes over his spirit. Prayer has brought him to his senses. It seems that his memory was quickened by a sudden inspiration, causing him to recall an ancient Word from God – given in some similar crisis – in which He promised to His anointed king the complete possession of the Holy Land. In this Divine decree, God promised to divide Shechem and to measure out the Valley of Succoth. Then, in verse 7, Gilead and Manasseh – which represent the part of the country on the eastern side of the Jordan River – are claimed by God to belong to Him. And of Ephraim and Judah, which represent the division of the land west of the Jordan, it is said that the one shall be His helmet (“the strength of mine head”) and the other His scepter (“my lawgiver”). After the different portions of the Holy Land were thus represented by these well-known parts, the hostile nations which were also to be subjugated are represented by Israel's three well-known foes: Moab, Edom, and Philistia. And just as the positions which Ephraim and Judah were to occupy are depicted by saying that they are to fulfil the honorable offices of helmet and scepter to God; so also, the fate of the hostile nations is similarly depicted by representing them as fulfilling to Him the most lowly and humiliating offices (verse 8). Moab was to be the vessel in which He washes His feet after coming home from a journey, Edom was the servant to whom He flings the dusty sandals which He has taken off, and Philistia is to grace His triumph. With these figurative expressions, the Psalmist rallied his spirit in his hour of distress. And as we fight the Lord's spiritual battles in our own times, we can similarly fall back upon the promise that is recorded in the second Psalm – namely, that the heathen shall be given to Christ, and that the uttermost parts of the earth shall become His possession! And even the humblest Christian can rest himself on the Savior's promise that none shall ever be able to pluck him out of His Shepherd's hand, and that the good work which God has begun in him shall surely be brought to perfection.

The last four verses show the return of the Psalmist's hope. In verse 9, in the strength of the Lord, he turns to face the crisis which he had bewailed in the first part of the Psalm. Only God could help him overcome the difficulty of the situation with the Edomites. When the Lord's servants have learned to trust in God alone, nothing can stand in their way; and hence this Psalm, which began in panic and tears, ends with the trumpet-note of hope!

Lord Jesus, we praise You for continually expanding the boundaries of Your spiritual Kingdom and for defeating Your and our spiritual enemies! Amen.

