

The trilogy of covenant psalms (Psalms 105-107) puts the content of Psalm 108 in a new light. The psalmist has taken the words of David in Psalms 57 and 60 and edited them in such a way as to form a praise anthem with prophetic impact. What is missing from Psalm 57 and 60 is the description of desperate times. David is neither on the run from ravenous beasts (Ps 57:4) nor reeling from God's anger (Ps 60:1). The psalmist has combined the positive conclusions of two angst filled psalms (Ps 57:7-11; 60:5-12), in order to emphasize the victory of the covenant people of God. The exposition that follows is drawn from the expositions of Psalm 57 and 60.

Awake my Soul!

*My heart, O God, is steadfast,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.
I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.*

Psalm 108:1-5

A theology of trust and a psychology of confidence converge here as they did in Psalm 57 to form the resilient saint. In response to three substantial covenant psalms, celebrating the faithfulness of God (Ps 105), acknowledging the faithlessness of the people of God (Ps 106), and celebrating the Lord's saving deliverance for the people of God in dire straits (Ps 107), Psalm 108 brings the sequence to end in an anthem of pure praise and international victory. There is something to be said for the emotional relief of a steadfast heart and a melody of praise.

The expectation and experience of deliverance releases within the soul of the psalmist the spiritual endorphins of praise. David's exuberance can hardly be contained. The psalmist shouts, "Awake, my soul!" Peterson's paraphrase reads, "I'm ready, God, so ready, ready from head to toe, ready to sing, ready to raise a tune: 'Wake up, soul! Wake up, harp! Wake up, lute! Wake up, you sleepyhead sun!'" (Ps 57:8, *The Message*).

In Book II the preferred name of God is Elohim, the plural form of El (the plural of intensity) emphasizing that Israel's God is the God above all gods. But in his crescendo of praise, drawn from Book II, the psalmist uses "Yahweh," the more personal name for Israel's covenant-keeping, covenant-loving Lord, to emphasize that Yahweh is the Lord of the nations and that all

the peoples “are supposed to be brought to the knowledge of God.”¹ The apostle Paul argues in Romans that Christ fulfilled the promises made to the patriarchs when he made it possible for the Gentiles to glorify God for his mercy. He quotes from the psalms: “Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name” (Rom 15:9; Ps 18:49; 57:9; 108:3).

The psalmist takes it even further, the Lord of the nations is the Lord of the universe. There is a “cosmos-wide reach of God’s commitment and truthfulness” and a “cosmos-wide manifestation of God’s splendor.”² No matter how personal the psalms may be we are encouraged to never lose sight of the universal scope of God’s glory.³ Delitzsch writes, “Here we perceive the self-consciousness of a comprehensive mission, which accompanied David from the beginning to the end of his royal career.” And this mission extends not only to the nations but to the universe. “Heaven and earth have a mutually involved history, and the blessed, glorious end of this history is the sunrise of the divine doxa over both, here prayed for.”⁴ Jesus echoes the scope of this psalm in his high priestly prayer when he prays, “Father, glorify me in our presence with the glory I had with you before the world began The glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:5, 24).

The Sovereign Savior

*Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.
God has spoken from his sanctuary:
“In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.
Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.
Moab is my washbasin,
on Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph.”*
Psalm 108:6-9

The trilogy of covenant psalms remind Israel of their complete dependence upon the mighty hand of God. Like David the warrior-king the exiles re-discover under pressure their need of the Savior. Israel’s very existence is impossible apart from God. Only with God can Israel succeed. The realization of God’s faithfulness (Ps 105), our resistance (Ps 106), and the desperation of the human condition (Ps 107), yields to a confident hope in the midst of salvation history. Psalm 108 reminds us that our hope is in the Lord and not in ourselves. We take our lead from the Lord Jesus who said, “By myself I can do nothing” (John 5:30). When Jesus disputed the Pharisees, he clarified the source of his power and authority. He said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the

¹ Calvin, Psalms, 366.

² Goldingay, Psalms, 199.

³ Reardon, Christ in the Psalms, 112.

⁴ Delitzsch, Psalms, 2:178.

Father has taught me” (John 8:28). For the Son of David and his followers to pray Psalm 108 is to acknowledge that apart from Christ we can do nothing. We share in the apostle Paul’s conviction, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13 KJV). We see a corresponding link between the psalm and the apostle Paul’s experience when the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

The psalmist gives us the words to pray out our hope. David offers a simple prayer: “Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered” (Ps 108:6). The right hand of God is more than able to handle the threat. And the basis for appeal is the covenant identity of the beloved. Everything that needs to be prayed is contained in that simple sentence. We are reminded that no matter how complex and chaotic our situation may be it comes down to this simple prayer for help.

In spite of how things might seem in the moment there is a kingdom strategy at work. The word of God has spoken and the land belongs to the Lord. Ross writes, “By selecting these representative sections, the psalmist was recalling the ancient allotments of the land by the Lord in order to reiterate the fact that the land belonged to the Lord.”⁵ David’s prayer for deliverance rests on the revealed promises of God. The land does not belong to various people groups; it belongs to the Lord. “In a few bold strokes the early history and distinctive areas of Israel are called to mind, and the chief agents of defense and rule (helmet and scepter) are named.”⁶ Kidner draws special attention to the repeated “mine” and “my” to underscore that everything belongs to the Lord and this emphasis on God’s possessiveness only serves to affirm the lasting inheritance of the land to the people of God.

With the coming of Christ, the true and lasting Son of David, there is a new inheritance that is described as imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Pet 1:4). This inheritance fulfills and transcends the covenant promises given to Israel. It is no longer tied to the land or political autonomy. “The notion of a holy land is superseded by that of a holy community (1 Peter 2:4-10).⁷ The boundaries of the Promised Land have been effectively shifted to the global reach of the gospel: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The people of God are drawn from “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev 7:9). The messianic community is no longer ethnically and geographically limited to Jews and Israel. There is an open invitation to Jews and Gentiles, religious and secular alike, to come home to Jesus Christ. Our new home is anywhere Jesus is, whether in Ulan Bator, Mongolia or in Butte, Montana.

Led by God

*Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
Is it not you, God, you who have now rejected us
and no longer go with our armies?
Give us aid against the enemy,*

⁵ Ross, Psalms, 342.

⁶ Kidner, Psalms, 217.

⁷ Elliott, 1 Peter, 336.

*for human help is worthless.
With God we will gain the victory,
and he will trample down our enemies.*

Psalm 108:10-13

David's four-part conclusion is in the true character of a godly leader. The king asks a critical question, makes a painful observation, issues a desperate plea, and offers a confident hope. The question is asked by David, not the Lord: "Who will bring me to the fortified city?" The rhetorical question highlights the need of the hour and states the obvious – no human leader can accomplish this victory. The countries surrounding Israel, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, may wish for Israel's demise, but the Lord will triumph over these countries and they will become Israel's servants. Israel's destiny does not lie in the hands of the army, but in God.

There is no hint of triumphalism in David's question, "Who will lead me to Edom?" When David wrote this he may have been a conquering king fresh from a series of military victories, but he does not presume upon God's mercy. The Edomite threat has humbled David to his core and he wants all to know that he bows low before the sovereign Lord of Israel. David knows that he and his people are completely dependent upon the Lord to lead them. He stands in need of the Lord's rule and reign and he wants all to know that "human help is worthless" (Ps 108:12).

For the Christian, "the fortified city" points forward to "the great city" described in the Book of Revelation. It represents the power of evil arrayed against the people of God. No human leader is sufficient for the challenge; no army can achieve the victory. The question, "Who will bring me to the fortified city?" (Ps 108:10), takes on special significance in the light of the incarnation of God. The author of Hebrews speaks of Jesus who "suffered outside the city gate" in order "to make the people holy through his own blood" (Heb 13:12). The citizens of the New Jerusalem have been washed in the blood of the Lamb who suffered outside the city gate. God goes outside the city to die on the cross in order to lead us into the City of God. Jesus gained the victory by following a strategy radically different from any worldly king or political ruler. He rejected the Messianic enthusiasm of the crowds that wanted to seize him and make him king (John 6:15) in favor of the rule of God from above. He would neither make himself king nor be made king, by anyone other than his heavenly Father. Jesus, the Son of David, was a very different successor to David and a very different king.⁸

The fortified city of Edom continues to symbolize the world's opposition to Christ and his kingdom. Down through the centuries the Edomites opposed the people of God and sought their destruction. The fifth century BC prophet Obadiah prophesied against Edom. In spite of Edom's physical elevation and nearly impenetrable natural fortress, the descendants of Esau were destined for shame and judgment, because she had shown "violence against your brother Jacob" (Obadiah 1:10). Obadiah insisted that Edom was part of a bigger picture. He declared, "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your head" (Obadiah 1:15). The house of Jacob will possess its inheritance and the house of Joseph will set on fire the house of Esau and it will be consumed (Obadiah 1:17-18).

⁸ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations*, Cambridge, 1996, 116.

Obadiah prophesied that Edom as Edom would be no more: “There will be no survivors from the house of Esau” (Obadiah 1:18). But this is not the last word on the descendants of Esau. Under the rule of God, Edom has a future. In the future, the mountains of Esau will be populated by the people of God. “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom’s will be the Lord’s” (Obadiah 1:21). Obadiah envisions the future Kingdom of God embracing the land of the Philistines, Samaritans, Phoenicians, and Edomites.

Mount Zion and the mountains of Esau will be ruled by God’s justice. David’s strategy of conquest will become the Son of David’s strategy of redemption. “The last line of the prophecy takes a giant step out of the centuries of hate and rivalry and invective,” writes Eugene Peterson. “Israel, so often a victim of Edomite aggression through the centuries, is suddenly revealed to be saved from the injustices of the past and taking up a position of rule over their ancient enemies the Edomites. But instead of doing to others what had been done to them and continuing the cycle of violence that they had been caught in, they were presented as taking over the reins of government and administering God’s justice justly. They find themselves in a new context—God’s kingdom—and realize that they have a new vocation—to represent God’s rule.”⁹ Psalm 108 ends on a powerful note: apart from God we are helpless and lost, but with God “we will gain the victory” and God, not us, “will trample down our enemies” (Ps 108:13). We can be assured that the way that Jesus, the Son of David, has gained the victory does not follow the strategy of worldly kings and rulers.

⁹ Peterson, *The Message*, 494.