

Week 4 – Psalm 60

A Communal Lament

Headings, Structure, and other uses

- This Psalm, along with Psalms 16 and 56-59, is labelled a *miktam* of David. There is no consensus as to what that means, though this heading elaborates that it is for instruction.
- Different translations help us understand the difficulty in translating some of the headings terms. The NIV translates “The Lily of the Covenant” as a tune title. The NASB version simply leaves the difficult phrase untranslated.
- The heading possibly connects this Psalm with 2 Samuel 8, though the details of the battle differ in the two accounts.
- The NASB picks up the three-part structure well with the first two parts beginning with the word “God” (vv 1, 6) and the third part beginning with a rhetorical question to which “God” is the only appropriate answer.
- Verses 5-12 show up again with small alterations in Psalm 108:7-13, a psalm of thanksgiving. The first half of that Psalm comes from Psalm 57:7-10.

Psalm 60:1-5 – God has rejected us

- The Psalm begins with a strong lament, “God, You have rejected us. You have broken us; you have been angry.” (v 1).
- Remarkably, the psalmist does not think the rejection is or has to be permanent because he immediately calls upon the Lord, “Restore us!”
- The psalmist describes their plight with two pictures.
 - o The first is an earthquake. God has split the land open and made it sway, but the psalmist calls on the Lord to heal the cracks in the land (v 2).
 - o The second is a bitter draught. The Lord has made his people drink a bitter drink of hardship that has left them staggering like a drunk (v 3) – see Jeremiah 25:15-38 and Isaiah 51:17 for similar metaphors.
 - o These metaphors likely refer to a military defeat.
- Verse 4 is a challenging verse for interpreters. It may be a picture of a banner that would be raised in battle calling on people to retreat safely back into a fortified city beyond the reach of archers (see Jeremiah 4:6). If this is the case, the psalmist believes that while God is angry with his people, he still offers safe haven to those who will return to him.
- Once more, the psalmist calls on the Lord to save his people (v 5).

Psalm 60:6-8 – God’s Promise

- God speaks from his sanctuary an assurance that he remains sovereign over all the land despite the country being overwhelmed by enemies (v 6).
- The various countries listed describe the central territory of David’s kingdom and the land promised to Israel by the Lord (see Joshua 8:30-35 and Deuteronomy 27:11-13).

A Song for Every Season: A Study on the Psalms

- Shechem is not far from Samaria.
- Succoth is east of the Jordan.
- Gilead and Manasseh were part of the conquest assignment of land in Numbers 32.
- Ephraim was another name for the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Judah was the southern kingdom.
- Moab and Edom were located east of the Jordan and south of Gilead.
 - They are represented as menial slaves.
 - They wash the feet and pick up the shoes of the master.
 - The author may have in mind the foul smell of the Dead Sea when equating Moab with a washbasin.
- Philistia was the ancient enemy of Israel – the text can be read that God will shout over Philistia in triumph (NIV) or that Philistia will shout out because of God’s mighty acts (NASB).
- The Psalm is an assurance that God’s promise of the land remains even if the land is currently possessed by foreign powers.

Psalm 60:9-12 – The People’s Hope

- In light of the promise, the psalmist asks who will lead Israel against her enemies (v 9).
 - The Edomites were the traditional enemies of Israel (see 1 Sam 14:47).
 - They may serve as a symbol of all the enemies of Israel.
- The psalmist asks if God will lead them, even though it is he who has rejected them and abandoned their armies (v 10).
- The psalmist recognizes the futility of human help and turns to God in prayer (v 11).
- The psalmist declares a new hope, “With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies” (v 12).
- Paul’s confidence is similar in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who gives me strength.”

Other Communal Psalms of Lament

- Psalm 12 – A complaint about the success of the wicked and the suffering of the poor and needy. Key verse: “Help, LORD, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race” (v 1). See Psalm 14 and 53 for similar themes.
- Psalm 44 – A complaint about God’s failure to deliver his people from a foreign enemy. Key verse: “Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever” (v 23).
- Psalm 90 – A lament over God’s anger and a request for God’s compassion and personal wisdom. Key verse: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (v 12).

Sources

- Davidson, Robert, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
- Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 2: Psalms 42-89, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).
- May, James L., *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1994).