

Psalm 60

Prayer during the Day Friday Week 2

The city wall has been breached. The invading army is causing the earth to tremble as in an earthquake. Compare the following from the prophet Joel:

They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

– Joel 2:9-10

The tension between God's remembered promise and the actual situation expressed in a lament is resolved in the final verse with an act of trust. Verses 5-12 are repeated in Psalm 108:6-13. The title reads: 'To the leader: according to the Lily of the Covenant. A Miktam* of David; for instruction; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.' 'The lily of the Covenant' indicates the tune to be followed. The scene referred to is found in 2Samuel 8:2,3,13 and 1Chronicles 18:2,3,12.

Part One. Lament and supplication

Since the psalmist believes that God directs events, the lament is directed to God in the hope that God will bring relief and salvation.

Similar imagery is found in the following:

Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of YHWH the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl that has caused you to stagger ... See, I have taken the cup from your hand; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath.

– Isaiah 51:17,22

Let their own eyes see their destruction, and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty.

– Job 21:20

In the hand of YHWH there is a cup, a jug filled with drugged wine. He will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it to the dregs.

– Psalm 75:8

God's role here is ambiguous. God has allowed the battle, but also provided refuge. God has put them to flight, but also invited them to rally around his standard.

¹O God, you have rejected us, you have breached our wall; you have become angry*; come back to us!

²You have caused the land to quake; you have torn it open. Repair its cracks for it is tottering.

³You have made your people suffer a disaster. You have given us wine to drink that has made us reel.

⁴You have set up a standard for those who fear* you, that they might rally to it out of bowshot.

A plea to be rescued

⁵Give victory* with your right hand, so that those whom you love may be rescued*. Answer us!

The psalmist knows that God will rescue ‘those whom you love’:

Of Benjamin he said: The beloved of YHWH rests in safety – the High God surrounds him all day long – the beloved rests between his shoulders.

– Deuteronomy 33:12

Part Two. Oracle promising victory and a prayer

⁶God has promised in his sanctuary [or ‘by his holiness’]: ‘In triumph, I will divide up Shechem, and portion out the Vale of Succoth.

Shechem is in the central highlands of Israel, about 65 kilometres north of Jerusalem. The valley of Succoth is the fertile region at the junction of the Jordan and Jabbok rivers, about 37 kilometres north of the Dead Sea.

⁷Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah my commander’s staff.

Gilead is east of the Jordan River. The tribe of Manasseh occupied the northern section of the central highlands of Israel and spread across the Jordan into Gilead. Ephraim occupied the southern section of the highlands. The psalm clearly favours Judah. Isaiah, a prophet from Judah, writes:

The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim.

– Isaiah 11:13

⁸Moab is my washbasin; on Edom I plant my shoe. Against me, Philistia, hurl forth a war cry if you dare!’

Moab is east of the Dead Sea and Edom is south of Judah and Moab. Philistia borders the Mediterranean. God is daring the Philistines to sing their war cry! Isaiah continues:

They shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west, together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them.

– Isaiah 11:14

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

¹¹O grant us help against the foe, for human help* is of no avail.

¹²With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes.

Only God can assure victory. Things have been going badly, but the psalmist continues to trust that God will be on their side.

