



Psalm 108 - Praise and Prayer for Victory

A Song. A Psalm of David.

Introduction

It would appear that David composed this community lament using material from two other psalms, with small variations: vv.1-5 are from Psalm 57:7-11, an individual lament, and vv.6-13 are from Psalm 60:5-12, a community lament. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The Holy Spirit is not so short of expressions that he needs to repeat himself, and the repetition cannot be meant merely to fill the book: there must be some intention in the arrangement of two former divine utterances in a new connection." The result has its own flow of thought: in the midst of a dangerous situation, the members of the singing congregation express their confident hope of thanking God among the peoples, including the peoples who are the present threat. This confidence is based on God's own oracles about the land, and not on how things look from a purely human perspective.

These are David's words, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, taken and applied to a present challenge. The enemies specified in vv.9-13 are Moab, Edom, and Philistia with the emphasis on Edom. It may be that the old foe, subdued in David's day, rose again and Israel must defeat her again. Or, it may be a different foe, the prior prayer and victory over Edom serves as an example and ground for faith in the present crisis. Psalm 108 shows that Christians can and should use the words of Scripture for their present prayers and praises, suitable to their present situation.

Psalms 108-110 are all attributed to David, (as are Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133, and 138-145). It is unclear why this group of Davidic psalms was placed here in the Psalter; perhaps the terms 'give thanks' and 'the peoples' establish a link with Psalms 105-107.

Psalm 108:1-4 - Confidently Expecting to Give Thanks.

The opening section expresses confidence and anticipation. The dangerous situation for which Psalm 108 is suited does not appear until v.6 hints at it. The basis for the confidence is God's own character, his steadfast love and faithfulness as he declared in Exodus 34:6-7. These words lead the singing congregation to feel their own confidence as they remember the promises that God has made to his people, for all history has demonstrated that God keeps his promises.

- ¹ My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make melody.
Awake, my soul!
- ² Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.

Psalm 108:1-2

My heart is steadfast. As David also sang in Psalm 57:7, he sang here of the strength of his heart in God. His steadfast confidence in God gave him a fixed point from which he could and would sing and make melody or give praise.

Awake, O harp and lyre! The earnest praise offered to God was musical. David was a skilled musician: <<*One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him'*>> (1 Samuel 16:18), and it could be said that this skill was part of his glory – so he offered it to God in praise.

I will awake the dawn. David was determined to give God the best in praise, so he gave unto God the choice part of the day. David let the sound of his praise greet the dawn as it rose in the early morning hours. Spurgeon observed, "Some singers had need to awake, for they sing in drawling tones, as if they were half asleep; the tune drags wearily along, there is no feeling or sentiment in the singing, but the listener hears only a dull mechanical sound, as if the choir ground out the notes from a worn-out barrel-organ. Oh, choristers, wake up, for this is not a work for dreamers, but such as requires your best powers in their liveliest condition."

- ³ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples,
and I will sing praises to you among the nations.
- ⁴ For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens,
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Psalm 108:3-4

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples. David directed his praise to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. Yet he did not mind praising Yahweh in the presence of the people of Israel, i.e. the peoples, or among the nations. His praise was not secret, but open and public.

For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens. The large audience was appropriate because of the large nature of God's great mercy. David understood that the mercy of God was so great that if it were to be measured, it would extend above the heavens, and his truth or faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Psalm 108:5-6 - Prayer for God to be Exalted.

The next section is the general prayer <<*be exalted*>> with the more specific <<*that those whom you love*>> may be delivered. Verse 5 comes from Psalm 57:5 and 57:11, and v.6 comes from Psalm 60:5.

- ⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
and let your glory be over all the earth.
- ⁶ Give victory with your right hand, and answer me,
so that those whom you love may be rescued.

Psalm 108:5-6

Be exalted, O God. If the measure of God's mercy and truth are high above the heavens and the clouds, then the honour and recognition to God should also be that great. A God of great mercy and truth is worthy of great praise and recognition of glory.

Give victory with your right hand. This is regarded as the hand of skill and strength. God's rescue could not come through half measures. David called upon God to bring his skill and strength into his rescue.

The right hand in the Bible always has the idea of the favoured position because generally speaking, the right hand is the hand of strength and skill. The right hand is associated with God's strength (Exodus 15:6), favour (Psalm 16:11), and help (Psalm 20:6). This is why Jesus is described as sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 14:62).

So that those whom you love may be rescued. David's praise transformed into a prayer, asking that he would be rescued from his present distress. The opening of Psalm 108 is so filled with praise that the reader does not even know that David was in trouble. He only mentioned his distress after setting his heart and mind right with praise from his entire being. David understood that God loved him, and

appealed to God on that basis. David's mind understood that there were many others that God loved, but his heart came to God as if he were the only one, not one of many. those whom you love is literally 'beloved', Hebrew *yadid*, and was in David's own name – *dawid*, which also means beloved.

Psalm 108:7-9 - God Has Spoken: "These Lands Are Mine!"

As with Psalm 60:6-8, these verses seem to recall an oracle, which God has promised, that gives God's plan for Israel's place in the world.

- 7 God has promised in his sanctuary:
'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 is my sceptre.

Psalm 108:7-8

God has promised in his sanctuary, or 'God has spoken in his holiness'. David was a prophet: <<*Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne*>> (Acts 2:29-30), and was about to prophesy of Yahweh's ultimate victory over all nations. He began by noting that this proclamation came from God's holiness, his quality and character of being separate and set apart from all his creation.

With exultation or 'I will rejoice'. God's victory over all nations pleases him. He does not and will not perform this reluctantly.

I will divide up Shechem, and portion out the Vale of Succoth. This refers to both a city and a region in Israel. God declared his sovereignty over the land, and that he would divide and portion it as he pleased. Comprehensively, the regions of greater Israel, including Gilead and Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River, and the central sections of Judah and Ephraim, were under his dominion.

Ephraim is my helmet. The tribe of Ephraim descended from Joseph and was one of the prominent tribes of Israel. Sometimes the northern tribes were collectively called Ephraim, after this large and influential tribe. Ephraim was like a helmet, expressing God's strength and security. This is reflected in the prophecy Jacob spoke over the descendants of Joseph shortly before his death: <<*Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall*>>.

The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers>> (Genesis 49:22-26).

Judah is my sceptre or law giver. If Ephraim expressed God's strength, the tribe of Judah expressed his rule and government, as a lawgiver. Judah was the tribe of King David and of Jesus the Messiah. A dying Jacob prophesied over the descendants of all his sons. Of Judah he said: <<*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his*>> (Genesis 49:10).

⁹ Moab is my wash-basin;
on Edom I hurl my shoe;
over Philistia I shout in triumph.'

Psalm 108:9

Moab is my wash-basin. Yahweh was not merely a local deity with authority over Israel alone. He was the God of all the nations, and David recognised that with mention of three neighbouring kingdoms. God would use Moab as it pleased him, and if it were for humble service like a basin for washing feet, then so be it. David did conquer Moab: <<*He also defeated the Moabites and, making them lie down on the ground, measured them off with a cord; he measured two lengths of cord for those who were to be put to death, and one length for those who were to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute*>> (2 Samuel 8:2). Both Moab and Edom were noted for their pride: <<*We have heard of the pride of Moab – how proud he is! – of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; his boasts are false*>> (Isaiah 16:6), and: <<*Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'*>> (Obadiah 3). Here God gives them places of humble service.

On Edom I hurl my shoe. In a day when roads and paths were dirty and covered with refuse of all kinds, a person's shoes were regarded with contempt. If God wanted to throw a dirty shoe over Edom as an expression of his contempt, he had the power and right to do it. With God's power, David did conquer Edom: <<*He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord gave victory to David*>>

wherever he went>> (2 Samuel 8:14). Spurgeon commented, “As an Oriental, who is weary, throws his sandals to one servant, and then puts his foot out, that another servant may lave it with flowing water, so David says, ‘I will use Moab and Edom as my servitors.’”

A similar practice was in place from God’s law if the brother in law of a widow refused to take her as his wife: <<*Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, ‘I have no desire to marry her’, then his brother’s wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, ‘This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house.’ Throughout Israel his family shall be known as ‘the house of him whose sandal was pulled off’*>> (Deuteronomy 25:8-10). **In Jesus’ time, shaking the dust off of shoes at someone was a sign of contempt:** <<*If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them*>> (Mark 6:11).

Over Philistia I shout in triumph. God’s dominion would also be expressed over these long and bitter enemies of Israel. God helping, David did conquer the Philistines: <<*Some time afterwards, David attacked the Philistines and subdued them; David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines*>> (2 Samuel 8:1).

Psalm 108:10-13 - Grant Us Help, for Vain Is the Salvation of Man!

These verses come from Psalm 60:9-12. Part of the background of Psalm 60 is a campaign that led to Edom; here, Edom is more generally a foe of God’s people.

- 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 O grant us help against the foe,
for human help is worthless.
- 13 With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.

Psalm 108:10-13

Who will bring me to the fortified city? This indicates that perhaps Psalm 108 was composed and sung on the eve of battle. Before David confronted a **fortified city** of Edom, he praised God and expressed his total confidence in God’s dominion

over Israel and the pagan nations. This is an important and eternal principle: That which seems unconquerable can be overcome by the power of God.

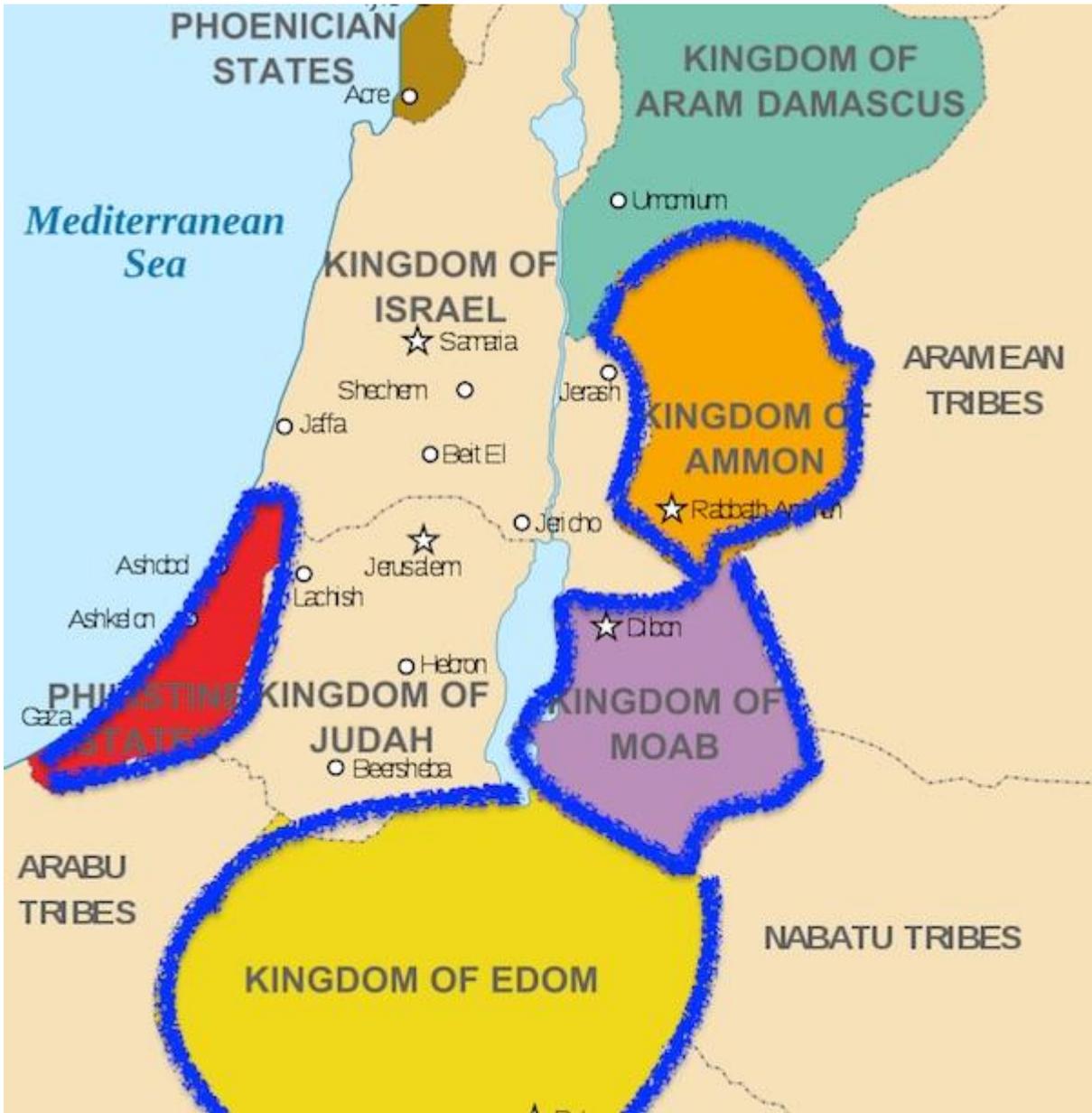
The most notable fortified city among the Edomites was the famous Petra. There is no record of David attacking or conquering that city. If the fortified city refers to Petra, perhaps David did it and it is not in the Biblical record. Or, David may mean Petra as simply an example of what seemed to be an unconquerable city that could not resist God's power if he willed it.

Have you not rejected us, O God? David prayed this prayer in light of recent defeats, recognising that those defeats came because God's favour did not shine upon Israel's armies: <<*Yet you have rejected us and abased us, and have not gone out with our armies*>> (Psalm 44:9). If God did not go out with Israel's armies, there was no hope for victory – for human help is worthless: <<*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals*>> (Psalm 118:8), <<*What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth*>> (Isaiah 10:3), <<*everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace*>> (Isaiah 30:5), and: <<*How lightly you gaded about, changing your ways! You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria*>> (Jeremiah 2:36).

For human help is worthless. David had seen many brave men accomplish great things on the field of battle. Yet for David and for Israel, the help of man was not enough; indeed, it was useless. God's help would lead them to victory. Spurgeon observed, "We ought to pray with all the more confidence in God when our confidence in man is altogether gone. When the help of man is vain, we shall not find it vain to seek the help of God."

With God we shall do valiantly. David's formula was simple. Without God, they could do nothing. With and through God, they could win great victories and accomplish great things. The victory belonged to God for it is he who will tread down our foes; it was Israel's place to praise God and bring themselves into a right relationship with him. This was the goal of this Psalm, and it can be supposed that it accomplished its purpose and the battle David faced was won. Spurgeon noted, "Divine working is not an argument for human inaction, but rather is it the best excitement for courageous effort." And again, "Faith is neither a coward nor a sluggard she knows that God is with her, and therefore she does valiantly; she knows that he will tread down her enemies, and therefore she arises to tread them down in his name."

David understood that it was for Israel to leave off fighting and passively see what God would do. Instead, they would fight, but fight with God. Their fighting through God would be brave and valiant, and in it they would see God tread down our foes.



Regional map showing the kingdoms referenced in Psalm 108