

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The psalmist complains of the desolation which had fallen on the land; prays for deliverance, Psalm 60:1-5; and promises himself victory over Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Ephraim, Moab, Idumea, and the Philistines, by the special help and assistance of God, Psalm 60:6-12.

The title, "To the chief Musician upon the hexachord, or lily of the testimony, a golden Psalm of David, for instruction; when he strove with Aram Naharaim, Syria of the two rivers (Mesopotamia) and Aram-Zobah, Syria of the watchmen, (Coelosyria), when Joab returned, and smote twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt." I have only to remark here that there is nothing in the contents of this Psalm that bears any relation to this title. According to the title it should be a song of victory and triumph; instead of which the first part of it is a tissue of complaints of disaster and defeat, caused by the Divine desertion. Besides, it was not Joab that slew twelve thousand men in the Valley of Salt; it was Abishai, the brother of Joab; and the number twelve thousand here is not correct; for there were eighteen thousand slain in that battle, as we learn from 1 Chronicles 18:12. The valley of salt or salt pits is in Idumea. To reconcile the difference between the numbers, various expedients have been hit on; but still the insuperable objection remains; the contents of this Psalm and this title are in opposition to each other. That the Psalm deplores a defeat, is evident from the three first and two last verses. And the Targumist seems to have viewed it in this light, perhaps the proper one, by expressing the title thus: "To give praise for the ancient testimony, (xix"x"xax* (sahadutha)), of the sons of Jacob and Laban, (see Genesis 31:47), an exemplar by the hand of David, to give instruction when he gathered together the people, and passed by the heap of testimony, (x"x™x"x"xix"x"xax* (ayegar sahadutha)), and set the battle in array against Aram, which is by the Euphrates; and against Aram, which is by Izobah. And after this Joab returned and smote the Idumeans in the Valley of Salt; and of the armies of David and Joab there fell twelve thousand men." The Psalm, therefore, seems to deplore this disastrous event; for although they had the victory at last, twelve thousand of the troops of Israel were justly considered too great a sacrifice for such a conquest, and a proof that God had not afforded them that succor which they had long been in the habit of receiving. The latter part of the Psalm seems to be intended to put God in remembrance of his ancient promise of putting Israel in possession of the whole land by driving out the ancient iniquitous inhabitants. Others consider the Psalm as descriptive of the distracted state of the land after the fatal battle of Gilboa, till David was anointed king of the whole at Hebron.

This is the last of the six Psalms to which xzx"xax* (michtam) is prefixed; the others are Psalm 16:1-11, Psalm 56:1-13, Psalm 57:1-11, Psalm 58:1-11, and 59: I have said something relative to this word in the introduction to Psalm xvi., but some observations of Mr. Harmer lead me to consider the subject more at large. It is well known that there were seven most eminent Arabic poets who flourished before and at the commencement of the career of Mohammed: their names were Amriolkais, Amru, Hareth, Tharafah, Zohair, Lebeid, and Antarah. These poets produced each a poem, which because of its excellence was deemed worthy to be suspended on the walls of the temple of Mecca; and hence the collection of the seven poems was termed Al Moallakat, The Suspended; and Al Modhahebat, The Gilded or Golden, because they were written in letters of gold upon the Egyptian papyrus. The six michtams of David might have this title for the same reason; they might have been written in letters of gold, or on gilded vellum, or the Egyptian papyrus; for the word xzx"xax* (michtam) is generally supposed to signify golden, and x"xax* (kethem) is used to signify gold, probably stamped or engraven with figures or letters. That the Moallakat were written in this way, there can be no question; and that the works of men of great eminence in Asiatic countries are still thus written, my own library affords ample evidence. Copies of the following works are written on paper all powdered with gold, with gold borders, and highly illuminated anwans or titles: The Misnavi of Jelaluddeen Raumi; The Deevan of Zuheer Faryabi; The Hadikatusani, or Garden of Praise; The Suhbet Al Abrar; The Deevan of Hafiz; Gulistan of Saady; Deevan of Shahy, with many more, all works of eminent authors, written in the finest manner, ruled with gold borders, etc.

Copies of the Koran are often done in the same manner: one in 12 mo., so thickly powdered over with gold that the ground on which the text is written appears to be almost totally gilded; another large octavo, all powdered with gold, and golden flowers down every margin; another small octavo, that might be almost called the Codex Aureus, with rich golden borders on every page. And, lastly, one in large folio, which besides superbly illuminated anwans, has three gold lines to every page; one at the top, one in the middle, and one at the bottom. To the above may be added a small folio, that opens out about eleven feet, every page of which is like a plate of solid gold, with the characters engraven on it. It is a collection of elegant extracts. Another of the same kind, large folio, opens out sixty-two feet, on which every page is finished in the same manner, with a vast variety of borders, sprigs, and flowers. And to close the whole, a copy of the Borda, supposed to be the most elegant MS. in Europe, entirely covered with gold flowers and lines, the writing the most perfect I ever saw; so that of this MS. it might be truly said, splendid as it is, materiam superabit opus.

As Mr. Harmer has alluded to accounts which he has collected from other writers in order to illustrate the

michtams of David, I have above produced a number of evidences to bear witness to the fact that such is and such was the custom in the east, to write the works of the most eminent authors in letters of gold, or on a page highly ornamented with the utmost profusion of golden lines, figures, flowers, etc. In this way these Psalms might have been written, and from this circumstance they may have derived their name. I may just add, that I think these titles were made long after the Psalms were composed.

Verse 1

O God, thou hast cast us off - Instead of being our general in the battle, thou hast left us to ourselves; and then there was only the arm of flesh against the arm of flesh, numbers and physical power were left to decide the contest. We have been scattered, our ranks have been broken before the enemy, and thou hast caused the whole land to tremble at our bad success; the people are become divided and seditious. Thou hast made the land to tremble, even the breaches of it, for it shaketh, it is all in commotion, Psalm 60:2.

Verse 3

Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment - We reel as drunken men; we are giddy, like those who have drank too much wine; but our giddiness has been occasioned by the astonishment and dismay that have taken place in consequence of the prevalence of our enemies, and the unsettled state of the land. It has been remarked that the three first verses of this Psalm do not agree with the rest, and it also appears that the three first verses of Psalm 85:1-13: do not agree with the rest of that Psalm. But let them change places, and the three first verses of this be set instead of the three first verses of Psalm lxxxv., and let those be placed here instead of these and then the whole of each Psalm will be consistent. This was first suggested by Bishop Hare, and the supposition seems to be well founded. Some imagine that the whole of the Psalm refers to the distracted state of the land after the death of Saul till the time that David was anointed king over all Israel, at Hebron; others, to the disastrous war with the Syrians. See before.

Verse 4

Thou hast given a banner - *nes* (nes), a sign, something that was capable of being fixed on a pole.

That it may be displayed - *lehithnos* (lehithnoses), that it may be unfurled.

Because of the truth - *mippeney koshet* (mippeney koshet), from the face of truth; which has been thus paraphrased: If we have displayed the ensign of Israel, and gone forth against these our enemies, who have now made such a terrible breach among us, (Psalm 60:1-3), it was because of thy truth - the promises of victory which we supposed would attend us at all times.

Mr. Mudge, thus: Thou givest to them that fear thee a signal to be displayed before the truth. That thy favored ones may be delivered, clothe thy right arm with victory, and answer us. God speaketh in his sanctuary, I will exult; I shall portion out Shechem, and measure the valley of Succoth. The fourth verse seems to mean that God had appointed for the consolation of his people a certain signal of favor, with which therefore he prays him to answer them. This, accordingly, he does. God speaketh in his sanctuary, called *rybd debir* or oracle for that very reason. What he desires then, as he stands imploring the mercy of God before the oracle, is, that he may see the usual signal of favor proceed from it; a voice, perhaps joined with some luminous emanations, whence the phrase of the light of God's countenance. The expression in the sixth verse seems to be proverbial, and means, I shall divide the spoils of my enemies with as much ease as the sons of Jacob portioned out Shechem, and measured out for their tents the valley of Succoth. Mr. Harmer gives a very ingenious illustration of the giving the banner. Albertus Aquensis informs us that when Jerusalem was taken in 1099 by the crusaders, about three hundred Saracens got on the roof of a very high building, and earnestly begged for quarter; but could not be induced by any promises of safety to come down, till they had received the banner of Tancred, one of the crusade generals, as a pledge of life. The event showed the faithlessness of these zealots, they put the whole to the sword. But the Saracens surrendering themselves upon the delivering of a standard to them, proves in how strong a light they looked upon the giving a banner, since it induced them to trust it, when they would not trust any promises. Perhaps the delivery of a banner was anciently esteemed in like manner an obligation to protect; and the psalmist might here consider it in this light when he says, Thou hast shown thy people hard things; but thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee. Though thou didst for a time give up thy Israel into the hands of their enemies, thou hast now given them an assurance of thy having received them under thy protection. Thus God gave them a banner or standard that it might be displayed, or lifted up; or rather, that they may lift up a banner to themselves, or encourage themselves with the confident persuasion that they are under the protection of God: because of the truth - the word of promise, which is an assurance of protection - like the giving me and my people a banner, the surest of pledges. - Harmer's Observations. See at the end of the chapter.

Verse 6

God hath spoken - Judah shall not only be re-established in Jerusalem, but shall possess Samaria, where Shechem is, and the country beyond Jordan, in which is situated the valley of Succoth. Dividing and meting out signify possession.

Verse 7

Gilead is mine - This country was also beyond Jordan, and Manasseh and Ephraim are put for the tribes that formed the kingdom of Israel. All these, after the return from the captivity, formed but one people, the Jews and Israelites being united.

The strength of mine head - It shall be the principal support of the new-found kingdom, when all distinctions shall be buried.

Judah is my lawgiver - This tribe was chief of all those who returned from the captivity; and Zerubbabel, who was their leader, was chief of that tribe, and of the family of David. As this part of the Psalm appears to relate to the return of the captives from Babylon, and their repossession of their own land, the psalmist may refer, not only to the promises of their restoration, but also to the principal person under whose superintendence they returned.

Verse 8

Moab is my washpot - The Moabites shall be reduced to the meanest slavery.

Over Edom will I cast out my shoe - I will make a complete conquest of Idumea, and subject the Edomites to the meanest offices, as well as the Moabites.

Philistia, triumph thou because of me - John Hyrcanus subdued the Idumeans, and caused them to receive circumcision, and profess the Jewish religion. The words here seem to predict their entire subjugation.

In an essay for a new translation of the Bible, there is what appears to me a correct paraphrase of the seventh and eighth verses: "Gilead and Manasseh have submitted unto me; Ephraim furnishes me with valiant men, and Judah with men of prudence and wisdom. I will reduce the Moabites to servitude; I will triumph over the Edomites, and make them my slaves; and the Philistines shall add to my triumph."

Verse 9

Who will bring me into the strong city? - If this part of the Psalm, from the sixth to the twelfth verse, refer to the return of the captives from Babylon, as I think probable; then the strong city may mean either Petra, the capital of Idumea; Bozra, in Arabia, near the mountains of Gilead; Rabba, the capital of the Ammonites; or Tyre, according to the Chaldee, the capital of Phoenicia; or Jerusalem itself, which, although dismantled, had long been one of the strongest cities of the east. Or it may imply, Who shall give me the dominion over the countries already mentioned? who will lead me into Edom? who will give me the dominion over that people?

Verse 10

Wilt not thou, O God - It is God alone from whom we can expect our enlargement. He who has cast us off, and has abandoned us in battle; it is that very God alone from whom we expect complete enlargement, the repossession of our own land, and the subduction of the surrounding nations; and we expect this, because he has graciously promised these mercies.

Verse 11

Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man - We have done all we can do, and have trusted too much in ourselves; now, Lord, undertake for us.

Verse 12

Through God we shall do valiantly - Through thee alone shall we do valiantly; thou alone canst tread down our enemies; and to thee alone we look for conquest.

The author to whom Harmer refers in the note on the fourth verse, is one of the writers in a work entitled *Gesta dei per Francos*, fol. Hanoviae, 1611, 2 vols. And the places quoted by Harmer may be found in vol. i., p. 282; and as the passage is singular, and a good use has been made of it for the illustration of a difficult passage, I shall lay the words of the original before the reader: "Proxima ab hinc die sabbati clarescente, quidam Sarracenorum spe vitae in summitatem tecti domus praecelsae Solomonis ab armis elapsi, circiter trecenti, confugerant. Qui multa prece pro vita flagitantes, in mortis articulo positi, nullius fiducia aut promissione audebant descendere, quousque vexillum Tankradi in signum protectionis vivendi susceperunt. Sed minime misellis profuit. Nam plurimis super hoc indignantibus, et Christianis furore commotis, ne unus quidem illorum evasit."

It is very properly added by Albertus, that the noble spirit of Tancred was filled with indignation at this most horrible breach of faith; and he was about to take a summary revenge on the instigators and perpetrators of this unprincipled butchery, when the chiefs interposed, and not only maintained the expediency of the massacre that had already been committed, but the necessity of putting all the inhabitants to the sword. On this the savage fiends, called Christians, flew to arms, and made a universal slaughter of all that remained of the inhabitants. They drew out the prisoners, chopped off their heads, stabbed all they met with in the streets, and-but I can translate no farther; it is too horrible. I shall give my author's words, who was an ecclesiastic, and wrote down the account from eye-witnesses: *Concilio hoc accepto, (the determination of the chiefs to put all to the sword), tertio die post victoriam egressa est sententia a majoribus: et ecce universi arma rapiunt, et miserabili caede in omne vulgus Gentilium, quod adhuc erat residuum, exsurgunt, alios producentes e vinculis et decollantes: alios per vicos et plateas civitatis inventos trucidantes, quibus antea causa pecuniae, aut humana pietate pepercerunt. Puellas vero, mulieres, matronas nobiles, et faetas cum puellis tenellis detruncabant, aut lapidibus obruebant, in nullis aliquam considerantes aetatem. E contra, puellae, mulieres, matronae, metu momentaneae mortis angustiae et horrore gravissimae necis concussae Christianos in jugulum utriusque sexus debacchantes ac saevientes, medios pro liberanda vita amplexabantur, quaedam pedibus eorum adolvebantur, de vita et salute sua illos nimium miserando fletu et ejulatu sollicitantes. Pueri vero quinquennes aut triennes matrum patrumque crudelem casum intuentes, una miserum clamorem et fletum multiplicabant. Sed frustra haec pietatis et misericordiae signa fiebant: nam Christiani sic neci totum laxaverunt animum, ut non lugens masculus aut faemina, nedum infans unius anni vivens, manum percussoris evaderet. Unde plateae totius civitatis Jerusalem corporibus extinctis virorum et mulierum, lacerisque membris infantium, adeo stratae et opertae fuisse referuntur, ut non solum in vicis, soliis et palatiis, sed etiam in locis desertae solitudinis copia occisorum reperiretur innumerabilis.* *Gesta Dei Vol. I., p. 283.*

This is one specimen of the spirit of the crusaders, and is it any wonder that God did not shine on such villanous measures! No wonder that the Mohammedans have so long hated the name of Christian, when they had no other specimen of Christianity than what the conduct of these ferocious brutes exhibited; and these were called *Gesta Dei*, the transactions of God!

There are many difficulties in this Psalm; whether they are in general removed by the preceding notes, the reader must judge. The following analysis is constructed on the supposition that the Psalm speaks of the distracted state of the kingdom from the fatal battle of Gilboa, in which Saul fell, to the death of Ishbosheth, when the whole kingdom was united under David.