

## Who's Who

### Psalm 60

The official mascot of the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., is an English Bulldog named *Chesty*. More specifically, he is Corporal Chesty XVI, meaning he is the 16<sup>th</sup> Chesty since 1957.

The inspiration for Chesty comes from Lt. Gen. Lewis *Chesty* Puller, the most decorated Marine in history. Among the many things Chesty Puller is remembered for is his famous words at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in Korea in 1950. It the stuff legend is made of, so his quote is rendered in different ways:

*We've been looking for the enemy for some time now. We've finally found him. We're surrounded. That simplifies things.*<sup>i</sup>

Another version of is, *All right, they're on our left, they're on our right, they're in front of us, they're behind us — they can't get away this time.*<sup>ii</sup>

The nation of Israel from its inception was surrounded by its enemies. Not much has changed in that regard. In the superscription<sup>iii</sup> of the psalm, Daavid warred with Aram-Naharaim (Aram of two Rivers<sup>iv</sup>) and Aram-Zobah. These were independent Aramean kingdoms, in the area of modern-day Syria, North of Israel.

Edom,<sup>v</sup> mentioned in the superscription of the psalm and in verse 8, was in the far south. Philistia and Moab are also mentioned in verse 8. They were located west and east of Israel.

Israel was quite literally surrounded. That not only simplified things; it complicated things too.

Psalms with historical superscriptions are both fun and difficult.

They are fun in that they give the preacher a nice story to tell from the life of David. Aaron and Lee love to hear me tell Bible stories. The difficult part is knowing how the historical reference relates to the psalm. It's not always clear, and Psalm 60 pulls me to the limits of my investigative powers. I don't say that seeking sympathy; I simply want you to know that scholars don't agree, and some may not

even try. I don't want to impose my creativity on the text, but the superscription is there, and we should not ignore it.

The superscription references 2 Samuel 8:13 (cf. 1Chron 18:1-13; 2 Sam 10:9-19; 1Kgs 11:15-16). 2 Samuel 8 summarizes David's victories.<sup>vi</sup> It's a glowing chapter. Two times 2 Samuel 8 says, *And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went* (6b,14b).

Here's the difficulty in reconciling Psalm 60 and 2 Samuel 8: Psalm 60 is a community lament after a crushing blow from the LORD (Ps 60:1-4,10-11), carried out by some enemy; and 2 Samuel 8 is a record of David's victories.

Let's look at 2Samuel 8 and see if we can figure out how a chapter of victory gives rise to a psalm of lament?

2 Samuel 8 begins by recalling David's victory over Philistines that is recorded in detail in 2 Samuel 5 (2Sam 8:1 cf. Ps 60:8). That battle marked the decisive defeat of the Philistines.<sup>vii</sup> Enemies to the west were destroyed.

Moab was next (2Sam 8:2; Ps 60:8). Enemies to the east were destroyed.

David defeated the kingdoms of the Arameans (2Sam 8:3-8 and Psalm 60 superscription).<sup>viii</sup> 2 Samuel 10 gives a more detailed description of this northern campaign. Enemies to the north were destroyed.

On the way back from his victory in the north, David learned that Edom had attacked Israel in the south (Superscription of Ps 60; 2 Sam. 8:13-14). We can only conclude that the Edomites saw an opportunity to attack Israel while David was fighting in the north.

I think this Edomite attack from the south was the crushing blow that Psalm 60 laments.

David ultimately defeated the Edomites, striking down 12,000 in the Valley Salt (Ps 60 superscription). 2 Samel 8:13 (cf. 1Chron 18:12) lists the number at 18,000. The biblical writers would have been aware of the difference in numbers.

The Edomite campaign extended for 6 months (1Kgs 11:15-16). Joab was

involved; David was involved; Abishai, Joab's brother, was involved. So, it was a massive undertaking. Most likely the different reports of the number killed was due to ongoing reports coming from the battlefield.

What happened? I can only speculate. David was clearly expanding the reach of his power. The LORD was giving him victory wherever he went (cf 2Sam 8:6b,14b). Somewhere in the expansion of his kingdom, God became David's adversary.

I think we have a hint of what happened in 2 Sam 8.

One of the promises of the covenant God made David was He would make David's name great.

2 Samuel 7:9b, *And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.*

A subtle sift takes place in 2Samuel 8, the victory chapter: *And David made a name for himself* (2Sam 8:13a). Obviously, David's victories were giving him a name. We could read that as God fulfilling His promise to make David's name great.

But there is a difference in God making your name great, and you making your name great. To make a name for oneself has a poor precedent in Scripture (cf. Gen. 11:4; 6:4). On the heels of the LORD giving David victories, David's hubris becomes a subtle and obvious theme as 2 Samuel progresses.

It's hard to be successful and humble. After the northern campaign (cf 2Sam 8&10), David will skip going to battle and sin in the matter of Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah the Hittite (2Sam 11).

I think this is it. This is the message of Psalm 60. It is a warning against pride. It is that subtle distinction of *who's who!* God is primary. We are secondary. It can never be the other way around.

While we are not likely to struggle with the pride of conquering nations, pride is a problem, nonetheless. I think it's necessary to distinguish between the good kind of pride and the bad kind. As a kid, I was taught to take pride in my work and my

appearance. That meant do a good job, comb your hair occasionally, and don't wear pajamas to the Tampa International Airport or Walmart. Take care of your family, make a home, mow your lawn; you know, take a little pride in yourself and your work.

That good kind of pride can turn into the bad kind quickly. I can become a workaholic just to advance myself, while call it providing for my family. On the other hand, I can stop caring about my appearance and call it fighting pride, like Shaggy on Scooby Doo.

Do we see how this works?

I don't know where this anecdote came from, but I have heard it like this. Someone said to a farmer who was working the land, *the LORD sure gave you a beautiful field*. The farmer replied, *You should have seen it when the LORD had it by himself*.

This anecdote, perhaps, encapsulates how some view life. When I work, it feels a lot like it's me working. I'm sure when David was swinging the sword and winning battles, it felt a lot like he was doing it.

Friend, It is *God who gives you the power to get wealth* (Deut. 8:18).

We could reply to the farmer, *I wonder what it would look like we removed God from the equation?* God made the dirt. Somehow, there is some relationship between a seed (that was God's idea) and putting it in dirt (that was God's idea), and it growing into something useful and helpful. Whatever that relationship is, it's not automatic; it's not simply naturalistic; it's not devoid of God's ongoing activity of upholding all things by the word of his power (Heb 1:3).

Hubris sneaks so easily into our lives and takes root. There are two kinds of people: the proud and those who fight pride. We want to make a name for ourselves. Hubris impacts every person and profession. More people have been slain by success than failure.

David defeated king after king, God giving him the victory. God was making a name for David, but David was making a name for himself. In the middle of

unprecedented expansion as a nation, God delivered Israel a walloping and unexpected defeat from Edom.

In Psalm 60, God's answers the hubris of David and everybody else.

In this psalm, the psalmist speaks (1-5), God speaks (6-8), and the psalmist speaks again (9-12).<sup>ix</sup> We see in the psalm how God deals with pride, and how we should deal with it as well.

### **1. God loves us too much not to oppose our pride (1-5)**

*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6). Pride breaks the first commandment. Of note in this first section of the psalm, the community does not lament that the Edomites have attacked them, but rather that God has opposed them.

The psalmist addresses God in verse 1: *O God, you have rejected us ....* In fact, He addresses God throughout the verses 1-5 with the second person pronoun *you*: *You have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; you have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; You have made your people see hard things; you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger; and you have set up a banner.*

In that catalogue of defeat are at least 8 verbs describing God's activity among them: *rejected, broken, angry, quake, torn, made to see, given, and set up*. These descriptions are powerful, even catastrophic.

God's activity (1) impacted both the land (2) and the people (3-4). The land quakes, is torn, has breaches, and totters.

As for the people, God made them see *hard things staggered* by them (3).<sup>x</sup> They cannot forget God and live in the land.

In verse 4, God raised a banner or signal that they may flee from the *bow*.<sup>xi</sup> Interpreters are divided on whether this verse is negative or positive.

Negatively, is God signaling he is bringing disaster on Israel? Or, positively, is God moving to save those who fear him?

Jeremiah captures the idea of the verse: *Raise a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, stay not, for I bring disaster from the north, and great destruction* (Jer 4:6). The negative reading seems right because it stays within the context of the lament portion of the psalm. God was opposing Israel. The *signal* is an announcement, *it's time to run for your life*. That is hardly a positive thing. When I'm running for my life, I never think, *This is such a positive experience*.

Within the lament of verses 1-5, a plea is voiced 3 times: *restore us* (1b), *repair the land* (2b), and *give salvation and answer us* (5b). Notice in the pleas, they are calling on the God who opposed them. This is one of the great lessons of the Bible: cast yourself on the mercy of God.

Often, I've heard it said that in the worldview of the ancient Israelites they believed God was in control of all that happens. So, if they were defeated, they believed God did it. Hence, texts like verses 1-5.

Dear Friend, the idea that God is sovereign over every detail of our lives is not a mythical belief of an ancient and backward people. God opposes the proud.

We get fixated on the details, the secondary players and lose sight of the larger reality. If the psalmist had focused on Edom, His only solution would have been to fight harder. So often in the face of the LORD's discipline, we simply double down in our course. If we focus too much on the secondary causes, we may dismiss the warnings of the God who loves us.

Notice the language of verse 5; the psalmist notes that they are his *beloved ones*. Dear Friend, we must cast ourselves upon the mercy of the God who opposes us, pleading for him to save us by his right hand. You may think, *If God loves us, he has a strange way of showing it*.

<sup>xii</sup>The most gracious, loving, and kind thing God can do for us is oppose our pride. God does not trouble us because he is against us but because he loves us.

## **2. Realizing the sovereignty of God helps us fight pride (6-8)**

We have to get straight on who is in charge. In verses 6-8, God answers the psalmist's plea in verses 1-5. He answers with a profound statement of his

sovereignty not only over the land, but also over Israel's enemies outside the land.

This is an oracle<sup>xiii</sup> from the LORD that recalls the conquest and applies the principles of it to Israel's present reality.

God had made an oath in his holiness; we have the content of the oath in 6b-8.<sup>xiv</sup>

6b-7 recalls the conquest of the *land*. With *exultation* God divided up the land. This is the only time God is said to *exult*.<sup>xv</sup> God is eternally happy with his acts.

In 6b, Shechem and Succoth represent land on the west and east sides of the Jordan respectively.

In verse 7, God claimed Gilead and Manasseh: *Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine*. Gilead and Manasseh represent land on the east and west of the Jordan.

*Ephraim* and *Judah* were the two dominate tribes of Israel, and here represent the totality of the land, north and south.<sup>xvi</sup> The land is God's, and he sovereignly gave it to them.

Further, Ephraim as God's helmet and Judah as God's scepter speaks to how they were instruments in God's hands.

This language of ownership and instrumentality extends to nations outside the land: to Moab, Edom, and Philistia—the very enemies in 2 Samuel 8 that David defeated.

Those nations that seemed so formidable to Israel belonged to God, and He could do with them as He pleased. God had exalted Ephraim and Judah to the place of helmet and scepter. Moab and Edom, God reduced to the status of menial servants: *Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my show*. Philistia, God reduced to a non-factor.

God is seen in this passage as the divine warrior. This oracle is a corrective to the proud, to those who would think the success of God's program depends on them. God not only rules over the nations of the promised land; he rules over the nations outside the land. He is not only Lord over his people; he is Lord over our enemies as well.

While the victories David secured in 2 Samuel 8 looked a lot like David acting as a great warrior, it was God who gave David the victory wherever he went (2Sam 8:6b,14b).<sup>xvii</sup>

If you remove God from the equation, Israel would never have possessed the promised land, and David would not have defeated the enemies surrounding him.

### **3. We must abandon our pride and realize our dependence on God (9-12).**

In light the oracle of verses 6-8, the psalmist realized his inability to overcome his enemies on his own. Edom was a formidable enemy. The campaign took 6 months (cf 1Kgs 11:16).

Realizing his dependence on God, the psalmist asked, *Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom (9)?*

These rhetorical questions are an admission that the psalmist cannot defeat his enemies on his own.

The problem, however, was that God had *rejected* (10 cf. 1) them. If God did not go with their armies, the conquest of Edom would not be possible.

Our utter dependence on God is a lesson we must learn over and over again. After the incident with the golden calf, God said he would no longer go with the people lest he destroy them on the way (Ex 33:3). Moses pleaded with God to go with them, *Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct ... from every other people on the face of the earth (Ex. 33:16)?*

What made Israel formidable was not David, but God. So, David pleaded for help against the foe (11a). *Help* is a strong word. It does not mean giving assistance, as in *help me carry this*. It's more like throwing a life preserver to a drowning man. Only God is himself the life preserver and the one who throws it. *Help* is for the desperate who have no resources, no power, and no possibility of helping themselves.<sup>xviii</sup> Maybe you are right here today?

The reason the psalmist cried for help was because he has no choice but to engage the enemy and no chance of winning: *for vain is the salvation of man (11b)!*

It's not that God needs us to do our part, so he can do his part. It's not the idea that we do what he won't do, and he does what we can't do. That not how things work. The psalmist said, *with God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes* (12).

God lets us participate in what he is doing. He lets us join him in doing what we are absolutely incapable of doing. He is the one who treads down our foes.

Indeed, David defeated Edom, but behind his action was the decisive action of God.<sup>xix</sup> God would swing the sword with David's hand.

Conclusion:

God opposes the proud. There is no room in the life of the Christian for self-will, arrogance and boasting. God speaks over our lives his absolute sovereignty. We must learn our utter dependence on God.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://grok.com/c/4660f5b0-a50b-46af-a15a-2766fae3af35?rid=2e013c9c-95bd-4323-883a-8e56e9d5273f>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://claude.ai/share/ae050b50-a0c3-4b70-ae4d-f44a97e40ae5>

<sup>iii</sup> Psalm 60 is the 5<sup>th</sup> miktam in a row (56-60) and the 4<sup>th</sup> of which has a historical reference to David (only the middle psalm of the 5 is without a historical note).

<sup>iv</sup> The Euphrates and the Tigris or possibly the Habur Rivers

<sup>v</sup> The Edomites were descendants of Esau.

<sup>vi</sup> The task of the king was to complete the conquest.

<sup>vii</sup> The Philistine wars are thus ended in OT history.

<sup>viii</sup> The superscription mentions Aram-Naharaim and Aram-Zobah. 2Sam 8:3-8 mentions Zobah and Aram of Damascus.

<sup>ix</sup> Ross, *Psalms 42-89*, vol. 2, 335-336. Ross has a helpful outline of the psalm. I like this abbreviated form of it.

<sup>x</sup> Hard things recalls the language of Ex. 1:14; 6:9; Deut. 26:6, the treatment of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage.

<sup>xi</sup> From the footnote on *bow*, you can see the Hebrew text has the word *truth*. Following the Greek text, we have the ESV translation: *You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow.*

Following the Hebrew text the translation would be, *You have given a banner to those who fear you, that it may be displayed because of truth.*

<sup>xii</sup> Yes. He does. When the psalmist was being lowered by a rope out of window to escape Saul's men in Psalm 59, He said that God was showing him steadfast love (Ps. 59:17).

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<sup>xiii</sup> Because passage is repeated in Psalm 108, it seems to have been a well-known oracle. Here used in time of lament and in Psalm 108 in a time of thanksgiving.

<sup>xiv</sup> The word *holiness* is sometimes translated, *sanctuary* (Psalm 150). Some versions translated it *sanctuary* in Psalm 60 (eg. NIV). How do you know how to render the word? When it is used in connection with an oath, it should be translated, *holiness*. When it is used in connection with the sanctuary, it should be translated, *sanctuary*. Here the word *holiness* is called for because it recalls God's promise to Abraham to give the land to his offspring. Hebrews 6:13 says, *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself.* God's promise to Abraham included land, offspring, and blessing.

See Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 229-230.

<sup>xv</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 230.

<sup>xvi</sup> In the divided monarchy, the entire Northern Kingdom is called Ephraim, and the Southern Kingdom is called Judah.

<sup>xvii</sup> Over and over in the period of the conquest, it was God who drove out Israel's enemies before them (Joshua 10:10,11,14,30,32,42; 11:6,8; 21:43-44; 23:3, 9-10; 24:8,11).

<sup>xviii</sup> Goldingay defines *help* this way (700).

<sup>xix</sup> Goldingay, 233-234.