

# Looking Back and Looking Forward

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 August 2020

Preacher: Fergus Macdonald

[ 0 : 00 ] in Aram Naharim or some part of Mesopotamia. He was far away near the Euphrates River. He was there in the far northeast corner of his kingdom, securing his borders.

And that's the first clue, that David was far away from Judah and Israel. And the second clue in the title is that there's reference to Edom there.

And we also find Edom occurring in the text of the Psalm in verse 8. So the hard providence that David was facing seems to be that while he was away, the country of Edom, an old enemy of Israel, invaded the land of Judah and Israel and took advantage of David being far away.

And when news of this invasion reached David, he was devastated. We read that very clearly in the first three verses.

He says this invasion by Edom was like an earthquake. It caused him to stagger and to reel. And so he prays to the Lord to give salvation by your right hand and to answer us.

[ 1 : 26 ] And so he prays for the Lord to save or the Lord to help with his right hand. And it's interesting in passing just to note how David brings this crisis to God.

Now, all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, face crisis at different times in our lives. And this psalm encourages us to bring our crisis to God and commit them to him and to ask him to overrule.

That's what David did. And David's prayer was answered, as we shall see. This psalm is a psalm which I've said helps us to understand why God allows such crises to happen.

It's an important psalm. The verses 6 to 8 of this psalm are repeated in Psalm 108. And this would suggest that these verses were very important because they are given again.

And in this way, they are being reinforced. Now, Calvin, the reformer, tells us that scripture is like spectacles. Scripture helps us to see things as God sees them.

[ 2 : 45 ] It helps us to see life and to see circumstances in the light of his word and in the light of his purpose. And so this psalm is like a lens which helps the people of God to look back and to look forward.

And it helps us as we, or will help us, as we bring our crises to God. So David reminds himself of what appears to be a prophetic oracle in verses 6 to 8.

We're not told who the prophet was. It may be that the Lord spoke directly to David. He tells us that these words were spoken by the Lord from the sanctuary.

And so probably they would have been uttered by a prophet, but we can't be sure about that. Now, when we read these verses 6 to 8, they seem very strange to us.

And we ask, I mean, what of Shechem, Sakoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah, what are they to do with us? Well, first of all, let us see what they had to do with David.

[ 4 : 02 ] They are all in the heartland of David's kingdom. And what this prophetic message is saying is that the heartland of the land of Judah and the land of Israel is God's.

He is the one who is the owner of the land. And so if we go back to verse 2, we find a reference there to the land. And that perhaps is a key, one of the key verses in this psalm.

That the land, it's not a land, but the land. That is the land which God had promised to Abram, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to their descendants.

And so what we have in this psalm is not only a hard providence being related to us, but we have a power promise. Here is the sovereign Lord of creation and of history saying that the land is his.

And so we have this special announcement from God, which forms the centerpiece of the psalm.

God is reaffirming to David his promise to give the land to his people.

[ 5 : 17 ] It's a reminder that David meant what he said when he made that promise to Abram. Let us just remind ourselves for a moment how Abram received that promise.

You remember how he left Ar and Haran and the Lord led him to the country of Canaan. And when he arrived there in Shechem, the Lord appeared to him and said, To your offspring, I will give this land.

Now that promise was repeated not only to Abram, but also to others. We see, for example, it was repeated to Isaac, David's son.

In Genesis 26, verse 3, we read these words. Sojourn in this land, the word of the Lord. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you. For you and your offspring, to you and your offspring, I will give these lands.

And I will establish the oath that I swore to Abram, your father. And then that same promise was repeated to Jacob, Abram's grandson.

[ 6 : 25 ] When he had that dream in Bethel, God said to Jacob, I am the Lord, the God of Abram, your father and the God of Isaac.

The land in which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring. And so the land was the divinely given inheritance of Abraham and his descendants.

And what verses 6 to 8 are saying, they're confirming that promise. They're ratifying that promise. The Lord is saying that the land belongs to me and I will give it to Abram's descendants, which included David and many others, as we shall see.

So we know from the books of Samuel and of Chronicles that Edom's victory was short-lived. We read in the superscription that David struck down the Edomites.

And we read in Samuel that all the Edomites became subject to David. And so David's prayer was answered by God renewing his promise, his powerful promise to him.

[ 7 : 39 ] But the point I think we need to take in is that this promise was a promise not only to David, it's a promise to us. It's a promise, it's our promise as well.

The title of the psalm says this psalm is for instruction or for teaching. And this psalm is there to teach us and to help all generations of the people of God.

And so when we ask ourselves, how are we to sing this psalm? How are we to pray this prayer? What does the land in verse 2 mean to us?

In what ways is the Lord's affirmation, Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine, relevant for us today? I think the answer is to recognize that although the land was Abram's, Isaac's, and Jacob's inheritance, and in fact the inheritance of David and all of God's ancient people, that they all died without actually possessing it.

Even after the conquest of the land under Joshua, when the people occupied the land, they did not possess it. They were not its owners. They were to regard themselves as tenants rather than owners, because the land was the Lord's.

[ 8 : 59 ] As we read in the book of Leviticus, the land is mine, and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. And one of David's last prayers recorded in the first book of Chronicles, it says these words, we are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors.

And so the significance, I think, for us is that this promise was not fully fulfilled in the lives of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

This promise will be fulfilled in New Testament believers, along with Abram and Isaac and Jacob and David, and the other believers of the old covenant.

And so what we have in this psalm is not only a hard providence and a power promise, but we have an eternal purpose in this psalm.

There's a strong link between the Old Testament references to the land and the New Testament and the Christian church. We find the use of the word inheritance, as we saw in our reading from Ephesians chapter 1.

[ 10 : 21 ] That word is stressed by Paul as he wrote his letter to the Ephesians. And we're reminded that Moses told the people, just as they were entering the land of Eden, that the Lord had taken them out of Egypt in order to give them an inheritance.

Jeronomy 4 verse 21. And what we find in the Bible is that this word inheritance is a key term which occurs again and again.

In Psalm 111, we read that the Lord remembers his covenant forever. And God's covenant, there's a sense in which God's covenant is eternal.

And when Paul wrote to the Ephesians in the next chapter, second chapter, which he didn't read, he reminds them that at one time they were strangers to the covenants of promise.

That they've been brought in to that covenant and brought under that covenant. And of course, we also recognize that this expansion of the covenant is essentially what Jesus meant when he spoke about the new covenant which he had brought and was establishing.

[ 11 : 44 ] It was, if you like, the new covenant is a sequel to the old covenant. The covenant with Abram, with Isaac, with Jacob, and with David. Now, Paul stresses this word covenant, not only in his letter to the Ephesians, but also when he spoke to the Ephesian elders whom he met at Miletus in Acts chapter 20.

Let me read what he said. And now I commend you to the word of God's grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

And as we read, Paul sort of expands that in his letter in verses 13 and 14 of the first chapter of Ephesians. He goes on in verse 18 to pray for the believers in Ephesus that they may know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints.

Now, here Paul is still speaking in the future. He's speaking that we will acquire, the people of God will acquire possession of the covenant.

The promise is there, a possession of the inheritance. The promise is there, but the full possession has still to come. And so this, I think, demonstrates that the New Testament makes clear that Israel's occupation of the land in the old covenant was a preparatory arrangement pointing to the final fulfillment of God's promise to establish Christ's kingdom on earth.

[ 13 : 45 ] And so the land was not an end in itself. It was a type. It was a teaching model, if you like, pointing to the coming of the Messiah, not only to his first coming, but also to his second coming.

Abram, we read in the letter to the Romans, was not only the heir of the land, but he is the heir of the world. And so the land has become a type, a symbol of the new heavens and the new earth. Abram was promised, as we've already noted, to become the heir of the world. And so there's a very real sense in which the inheritance to which Paul is referring in Ephesians chapter 1 and 2 is the inheritance of Abram.

But it's the sequel to that inheritance. It's filled out and expanded. We read in Galatians that Christian believers are the children of Abram.

So the posterity, the offspring of David, includes not only those who are descended from him in a genetic sense, but every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a child of Abraham.

[ 15 : 05 ] Now, I just want you to note what Paul says in verse 14 of Ephesians chapter 1, where he says that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

So Paul is anticipating a further fulfillment of this inheritance. The footnote in the ESV suggests an alternative translation, which is, until God redeems his possession.

And so the possession, although some commentators see the possession as the people of God, it may be that the possession is, in fact, the new heavens and the new earth, the world as it will be renewed when heaven and earth come together at the end of history.

Let me quote here from a free church theologian of the 19th century, Patrick Fairburn, who taught free church students in Glasgow when there was a free church college in Glasgow in the second part of the 19th century.

And he has written an outstanding book, which comes to two volumes on typology. Just let me read what he says.

[ 16 : 35 ] Man's original inheritance was dominion over the whole earth. When he fell, he fell from his dominion as well as from his purity. The inheritance departed from him.

He was driven from paradise, the throne and the palace of his kingdom. With man's loss of the inheritance, Satan was permitted to enter and extend his usurped sway over the domain from which man has been expelled as its proper Lord.

And so the fulfillment or the possession of this inheritance points forward to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us that David's victory over the Edomites was a type, was a sign, pointing to Christ's final victory when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power and putting all his enemies under his feet, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15.

And so the covenant which God made with Abraham looks not only, we don't only look back to that, but we look forward to the second coming of Jesus and to the resurrection of the body and to the regeneration of all things, when the universe will be renewed, when heaven and earth will come together, and when Christ's kingdom shall be universally established.

And so Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will possess their inheritance when Christ returns. And when they possess their inheritance, so also will all Christian people with them possess this great inheritance.

[ 18 : 25 ] And so we are not only the children of Abraham, but we are the brothers and sisters of Abraham, because we are together with him in this great drama of redemption, which God has initiated through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so this helps us to look back to the promise of God to Abraham, and it helps us also to look forward to the coming of Jesus again, when he will establish his kingdom in the new heavens and in the new earth.

And so this psalm is a psalm which reminds us that God has a strategy, God has a plan, that that plan is being fulfilled and will find its fulfillment.

It will find its climax when he comes again and when the resurrection takes place and when the whole world and the universe is regenerated.

And so this is a psalm which enables us to praise the Lord and to thank him that he is the sovereign, the one who is in control of the world and the history in which we live.

[ 19 : 39 ] Sometimes when we look out, we may be tempted like David and tempted like the people of Beirut to ask, why does God allow certain things?

And there are times and there are incidents when it's very difficult to see and to affirm the sovereignty of God. But remember what Jesus said about his kingdom. His kingdom, his rule, he said, is like a farmer who sows a seed and that seed lands in the earth and it grows, it germinates and it grows.

The farmer doesn't know how it grows. And first of all, he doesn't see it. It's buried under the earth, but he believes it to be there. He believes that it will grow, that it will germinate and grow and will provide a harvest.

He believes that. That's why he does it. And I think Jesus is challenging us also to believe that. To believe that sometimes when we look out in the world, when we watch the news on television and read the newspapers, it appears that God is not in control.

But this psalm and Jesus is reminding us that underground, the will of God is being done, that God is ruling.

[ 20 : 59 ] We cannot see it, but he is ruling and he will ultimately bring all his enemies under his feet and sin will be banished from his kingdom, banished from his regenerated universe.

And so the challenge, I think, for us is to look forward with anticipation and with joy and with faith to that great fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, of the new covenant which the Lord Jesus Christ has established.

And so as we see in this psalm and throughout in Ephesians, God's purpose being fulfilled down through the ages and coming to this dramatic climax, then we need to ask ourselves, are we part of that purpose?

Have we accepted him as our Lord and as our Savior? The psalmist in Psalm 106 prays these words, Remember me, Lord, when you show favor to your people.

Help me when you save them. Now, we are told in this psalm and we're told in Ephesians that God will save his people, that God will possess his inheritance and the inheritance of his people.

[ 22 : 21 ] The question is, are we asking God to remember us? Do we want to be included in this great purpose? And that is the challenge I want to leave with you this morning.

Remember what the thief on the cross said to Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom. And there's a sense in which he was echoing the words of Psalm 106 where the psalmist, as I've already quoted, prayed, Remember me, Lord, when you show favor to your people.

Now, Jesus will come in his kingdom. That's what Paul is saying in the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to the Corinthians. He will come. And the prayer of the thief on the cross is a mortal prayer for us to ask God, ask Christ, to remember us when he comes in his kingdom.

And his promise to the thief is the same, his answer to, his promise to the thief and his answer to his cry is also his answer to us and to all those who pray that prayer.

So let us now ask the Lord to remember us and to bless us and to bless all those whom we know and love and for whom we have and for whom we are concerned.

[ 23 : 42 ] So here, this word from this psalm, which is expanded, as it were, by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, and let us seek to respond by asking God to ensure that we and all those we love

are included in his saving purpose in this drama of redemption, which is being fulfilled and will come to a great climax when the Lord comes again.

So let us again bow our heads in prayer. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the way in which your word is interconnected and the Old Testament relates to the, anticipates the new and the new fulfills the old.

We thank you for the covenant that you have made with Abram and through Abram and Christ you have made with your people. And we pray, Lord, that all of us may indeed become the inheritors of that inheritance, that we may indeed seek to be part of the people of God, and that we may ask you to remember us and to enable us to be part of that great drama of salvation.

We thank you that you offered to do this for us, although we don't deserve it, for we have turned our backs upon you, we are in rebellion against you. But we ask, O Lord, that you will help us now to submit ourselves to you and surrender ourselves afresh to the Lord Jesus Christ and to his sovereign purposes for his people and for the world.

We ask this in his name and for his sake. Amen. All now and evermore. Amen.