

God: Judge of All The Earth

Psalm 58:1 *To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David.*

Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly?

² No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth.

³ The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

⁴ They have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear,

⁵ so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter.

⁶ O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD!

⁷ Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted.

⁸ Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun.

⁹ Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!

¹⁰ The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹¹ Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth."

Psalm 59:1 To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.

Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; protect me from those who rise up against me;

² deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men.

³ For behold, they lie in wait for my life; fierce men stir up strife against me. For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD,

⁴ for no fault of mine, they run and make ready. Awake, come to meet me, and see!

⁵ You, LORD God of hosts, are God of Israel. Rouse yourself to punish all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil. Selah

⁶ **Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city.**

⁷ There they are, bellowing with their mouths with swords in their lips-- for "Who," they think, "will hear us?"

⁸ But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you hold all the nations in derision.

⁹ O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress.

¹⁰ My God in his steadfast love will meet me; God will let me look in triumph on my enemies.

¹¹ Kill them not, lest my people forget; make them totter by your power and bring them down, O Lord, our shield!

¹² For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter,

¹³ consume them in wrath; consume them till they are no more, that they may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth.

Selah

¹⁴ **Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city.**

¹⁵ They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their fill.

¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.

¹⁷ O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love."

Psalm 60:1 To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth. A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.

O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us.

² You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; repair its breaches, for it totters.

³ You have made your people see hard things; you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger.

⁴ You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow. Selah

⁵ That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!

⁶ God has spoken in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth.

⁷ Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter.

⁸ Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph."

⁹ Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?

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

¹¹ Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!

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

Psalm 58-60

Yahweh and the Problem of Evil: A Case Study from 1 Kings 22

I WAS ASKED A QUESTION THIS WEEK by a friend that is closely related to our Psalms today. The question deals with a strange story found in 1 Kings 22. It is a [classic divine council scene](#), but it takes a twist that is difficult for many people to understand:

And Micaiah [the prophet] said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ Now therefore behold, the

LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you.”

(1Kg 22:19-23)

We see here the court of heaven. Yahweh is its leader and the host of heaven are deliberating over the fate of king Ahab, one of the most wicked kings in the history of Israel. This shows very clearly that there is heavenly interaction amongst several heavenly beings (not just Yahweh) that deal with us humans.

The first difficulty comes in the question Yahweh poses to the council, “Who will entice Ahab?” The word for “entice” can also mean “deceive.” But we know that deception and enticement are bad things. God does not do such things. So how could he ever be a party to them? Does this depict the LORD as an evil being?

The second difficulty comes when a “spirit” (*ruach*) comes forward and says, “I will entice him.” Yahweh asks him how, and the spirit responds, “By being a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.” Lying is a specific form of deception. The thing is, Yahweh tells the spirit to go ahead and do it and tells him that he will succeed in his mission.

Then the prophet caps it all off by confirming that the LORD put a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets. How can we possibly understand such a passage as this? How can the Bible not be teaching that God puts his blessing on sin and wickedness?

Psalm 58-60

This week we are concluding a series of psalms of David that began in Psalm 51. **Psalms 56-60 form a unit** that were collected together as “**Miktams**” of David. Last time we looked at how Psalms 56 and 57 are individual laments over the wickedness of men which build to a crescendo. That crescendo comes in Psalm 59 which we will look at today. But we will begin with Psalm 58 which was inserted between these others to help us reflect a bit more objectively upon their meaning.

We will finish with Psalm 60 which takes the individual reflection and helps us think collectively as the church about the implications should the God-side of this become more personal to us. Psalm 60 is “*A Miktam of David; for instruction.*” But **instruction for what?** This entire set of

Psalms have circumstances from the life of David at their center. So we are to learn things from his life that we can take into our own.

Psalm 59 was when Saul sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him (**Psalm 59:1**; cf. **1Sa 19:11**). **Psalm 60** has in mind several passages recorded in **2 Samuel 8:1–14** and **10:6–18** and **1 Chronicles 18:1–13** and **19:6–19**. **Wiersbe** summarizes that these occurred, “When David was winning battles and getting a name for himself (2Sa 8:13). While he was up north fighting the Arameans (Syrians), the Edomites attacked Israel from the south, doing a great deal of damage. David dispatched Joab with part of the army, and Joab and Abishai (1Ch 18:12) defeated Edom in the Valley of Salt, south of the Dead Sea. David must have written the psalm shortly after hearing the bad news of the invasion by Edom, but the psalm manifests a spirit of trust and confidence that the Lord would give Israel the victory, and He did.”¹

Psalm 58's situation is unknown, but it written to a tune called “**Do Not Destroy.**” Thus, like Psalm 57 and another

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 206.

Saul event, it clearly has something in the life of David in mind. Let's look at Psalm 58.

Psalm 58: Who is the Judge?

The interpretive crux of Psalm 58 occurs in **the first line** of the verse. “**Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?**” (Ps 58:1). The decision we have to make is the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as “**gods.**”

Hebrew was originally unpointed, meaning that there were no vowels, only consonants. The word unpointed is אֱלִים (*‘lm*). Around 1,000 A.D., Jewish scribes inserted vowels in the form of markers such that they did not touch the actual text, but worked around it. It was quite ingenious. The marking they gave this word was אֱלִים (the vowels are under the letters as ֵ and ִ; both are different forms of our letter “e”). Hence, the word is *‘elem* (a word also in the superscription of Psalm 56:1). This word means “silence.” This follows the Targum which clearly takes this to mean “silence”: *Are the righteous indeed silent in the time of strife?* (From the noun *‘alam*).

The LXX seems to imply the word *'ulam* (“but”). Others see it as a defective spelling for a ram, being metaphorical for a “leader” (*'ayil*; Dahood), but you have to start playing around with the consonants to do this. The most popular idea is that the Jewish pointing is wrong; the word should be pointed as *'elim*, a word for “gods.” This is the way the ESV and NAS go.²

This makes perfect sense of the consonants. It brings forth many parallels from a later Psalm in meaning—(Psalm 82 via **Deut 32:7-8**, as most modern commentaries point out. We’ll deal with this in much more detail when we come to that Psalm). It makes sense of the rest of the verse, which contrasts their decrees with judging over “**the children of man**” (literally the *beney 'adam* or “sons of Adam”). If it was speaking, for example, to the rulers of Israel, it would not say the “sons of Adam,” because those rulers were only over

² **Going Deeper:** A quick reading of various English translations show how difficult this is. The YLT has, “O dumb one” (from the word for “silent”). The Tanakh has “mighty ones” (similar to “gods”). Two other Jewish translations have “rulers” (quite human). Geneva and the KJV are similar, having “Congregation.” The RSV has “gods.” My solution is that “gods” makes sense of both “ruler” (since they are rulers) and also “silent ones” (as the sons of God are called “watchers,” those who simply watch and keep silent). Clearly, there are word-play ideas going on with all of these roots, and thus we may not actually have to choose at all, if we go with the translation “gods.” I’ve kept comments from five different commentaries on this word at the end of the sermon.

a tiny sliver of the sons of Adam: Israel.³ It makes even sense in light of vs. 4 where these gods' servants (i.e. "the wicked," most likely wicked human rulers vs. 3) are likened to **serpents** and adders (Satan is the great Serpent; the gods are often likened to seraphim-serpents). Finally, it also fits in nicely with the question I was asked at the beginning of the sermon. What is this about a lying spirit and the divine council? And as we will see shortly, this itself fits the context of the occasion when the very next psalm was written.

Psalm 58:2 says, "No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth." They do not judge the children of man uprightly. But instead, they seek ways of harming them. This is exactly what the lying spirit in the divine council seeks to do to Ahab. Before we can ask why God would decree this, let's finish the psalm.

"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies" (**Ps 58:3**). This does not refer to the gods, obviously. They are not born. It does seem to refer to **the kings of the peoples** who rule on earth in their stead. (Kings and Pharaohs were said to derive their

³ David could have the human rulers of all the nations in mind. This fits well with the previous two Psalms, especially Psalm 56. But he could also very easily have the divine council in mind; see our discussion on vs. 4.

authority directly from the gods, even in the Bible the kings of Israel were granted their authority by God).

This kind of wickedness follows in line with much that we have seen in this entire collection of psalms, even going back further than Psalm 51. Human beings are full of sin. But in the context of this psalm, these guys are even worse, for now they are just like the gods they worship. They have a kind of supernatural evil about them. They are serpents themselves (think of how Jesus called the Pharisees “a brood of vipers” who are “children of Satan”) whose ears are so full of venom that they can’t even hear the charmers and enchanters!

This is a very ironic way of putting it, for charmers and enchanters were people who, both then and now, basically used witchcraft in order to “control” the spirit-world. God forbids this kind of thing. Not because it isn’t real (to a point), but because it crosses boundaries that are not permitted to be crossed. And you can’t trust those guys over there, much less yourself. So these kings are so in league with the heavenly serpents that can’t even be controlled by witchcraft! Now THAT is true evil.

What do you suppose pleading with such people about doing justice and righteousness does? Could that even dissuade them from their iniquitous behavior?⁴ Just look to the satanic evil that is so much of modern politics. They laugh at righteousness; they mock justice. To try and argue from these as a basis is to beg for the forked tongues and fanged teeth to strike.

Therefore, the Psalmist has no choice (of course he doesn't!). “O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD!” (Ps 58:6). They are once more likened to the beasts of Psalm 22 who seek to devour the Messiah and his people. “Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted. Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun. Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!” (7-9).

What we are talking about here is **the justice of God**. He asked if the gods judge the children of man uprightly? The answer was clearly no. Now he is asking God to do what

⁴ Mitchell Dahood S.J., *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 17, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 60.

they won't, and to start with the leaders and ultimately the gods themselves. He is asking for what Isaiah will later say, "On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth" (Isa 24:21).

Why? Because they are wicked. Because they are evil. Because they pervert justice. Because they hate righteousness. This will have a two-fold effect as the song ends. First, "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked" (10). This is total victory so longed for by the saints. It is victory at God's hand, not our own. It is victory that puts an end once-for-all to the demonic evil of the leaders of this world. And it is the cry of every righteous person's heart.

Second, "Mankind will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth'" (11). The psalm ends with God as Judge and with the entire world finally recognizing it. This is *Soli Deo Gloria*—To God Alone Be the Glory. It is also the cry of our hearts, but it is also the end of all things that God does.

But notice the point and notice it well. Here he is praying that punishing the wicked might be a means through which God would use to save some of the peoples.

For if they see that there is a reward for the righteous (that God vindicates them even today), they may themselves begin to long for righteousness. When they see that the wicked are judged here and now, they may think twice about their own sin, and thus when they hear the gospel God may use it as part of his power to save them. These are things God uses in people's lives to effectually draw them to himself through the Gospel.

This *feels* (that is the word I mean) like a good time to begin applying the prophet Micaiah and the lying spirit story. But as these psalms really need to be read one after the other, I think we will keep going for now. It may help us in the end to do so.

Psalm 59: Judgment in the Midst of Evil

Psalm 59 picks up the themes of 56-57 again. 58 was an interruption for the sake of helping us gain a little perspective on evil in this world. But we return now to the lamentations of a man who is persistently under personal attacks from evil people, particularly his nemesis king Saul.

At this point in the story of Saul and David, the king is going increasingly mad. He seeks to put David to death (1Sa 19:1). But his son Jonathan intercedes, tells David to hide (2), while temporarily changing his father's mind (4-6). But time passed and wars raged on, with David gaining more victories and Saul being diminished in the eyes of the people (8). Then, curiously, just like our story with the divine council, "An evil spirit [NAS] from the LORD came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre" (9). This raises the same basic question in almost the very same way(!) I posed at the beginning of the sermon. How can the LORD send an evil spirit? The result of this evil spirit? "Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear" (10), but David escaped. The next verse is where the superscription for Psalm 59 comes from, "Saul sent messengers (literally "angels" as a kind of play on words, we know they are human, but the word reminds us of heavenly beings) to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning" (1Sa 19:11). Saul becomes the silent "watcher" using his own human-angels ... to kill the Lord's anointed!

We get the feeling that in the night David was praying, “Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; protect me from those who rise up against me” (Ps 59:1). “Deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men” (2). That’s certainly king Saul, but you can see how in Saul we have a specific example of a wicked ruler from the previous song. One who had been given up on by God and given over to evil spirits!

Saul now becomes like that lion, “For behold, they lie in wait for my life; fierce men stir up strife against me. For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD. For no fault of mine, they run and make ready” (3-4a). In all the stories of David, we never read even a hint that he did a single bad thing to Saul. Just the opposite! When he had chances, and there were many and we might even say he would have been justified—he actually spared the man. This is what makes the story of Saul and David so tragic. It is what unites our hearts to David’s, for who cannot read his story and feel terrible sorrow in his own heart for all that he went through?

He pleads with the Almighty to rouse himself, “Awake, come to meet me, and see!” (4b). One does not say such

things to the Most High if one does not mean it. “You, LORD God of hosts, are God of Israel. Rouse yourself to punish all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil. Selah” (5). Pause. This returns to themes from Psalms 56-57. He was attacked not only by Saul, but by Philistines and other enemies outside of Israel. David desires God to vindicate himself throughout the entire world, and not just to Israel. For David is a man who understands prophecy. David is a man who understands his God.

But he returns to his lament. “Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city” (6). They are wolves. They are ninjas. They are demons. “There they are, bellowing with their mouths with swords in their lips—for ‘Who,’ They think, ‘Will hear us?’” (7). The theme of the mouth from Ps 56-57 comes back into sharp (literally) focus. Their mouths are swords. With them, they taunt not only David, but his friends (like Jonathan). Not only them, but God himself. The wicked always think that whatever they do God is not there to see it. This is a good way you can know if you are among them or not: If you have no

thought that God sees what you do, then you are not one of his children.

Suddenly, a line similar to one in Psalm 2 appears, “**But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you hold all the nations in derision**” (59:8; see Ps 2:4). In that song, the LORD and his Son are laughing at the kings of the earth *and the gods of the heavens*. Psalm 58 comes back to our minds again. The effect it has is to bring calm in the midst of horror. A comic relief to a dread beyond words. “**It doesn’t matter how bad they act or what they do. God is laughing at them. God is laughing at them!**” You ought always to keep this thought in the front of your mind, especially when days are evil like they are today. What is God’s response to the evil in our world? Indifference? Powerlessness? Complicity? No. He laughs at them because he is sovereign and he knows it. It is the height of foolishness to think that you can do something against the will of the Most High. This again makes me want to start trying to understand our original question, but let’s finish the Psalm first.

In the structure of this psalm, it is this thought that leads him to a “testimony of trust in God.”⁵ Believing in God privately always becomes public in the Bible. Always. There is no such thing as a purely private faith. That is a modern lie of the devil. This is vv. 9-10. “O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress” (9). Saul watches for David—to murder him. David watches for God—to hide himself in his protecting love. “My God in his steadfast love (*hesed*) will meet me; God will let me look in triumph on my enemies” (10). Whether David gets out of this alive or not, he will see vindication—for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption (Ps 16:10).

Putting one’s trust in the love of God is a theme that returns again and again in the Psalms. It seems almost to be the central point, the thing upon which we are to remember most. Sadly, God’s love is perverted in two directions by Christians today. Some sentimentalize it and absolutize it, as if it is the only attribute that exists. These people will never

⁵ Robert L. Alden, “Chiastic Psalms (II): A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 51-100, *JETS* 17/1 (1974), 193 [originally pp. 11-28]. See especially the chiastic structure with 9-10 as the center. http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/19/19-3/19-3-pp191-200_JETS.pdf

be able to come to an understanding of the question posed at the beginning of this sermon. For the god of their making is loving to a degree that justice and holiness and sovereignty are wiped away into oblivion. That isn't love at all.

But others have gotten so wrapped up in God's wrath that they barely know about his love anymore. Especially if God only has hate for some people (as more than one person has told me), that he has no love for them whatsoever in any sense, then he simply isn't love—as he tells us that he is. This theology comes across more and more in the way these people treat their enemies whom Jesus tells us we are to love, but also even their fellow brothers in Christ whom John tells us if we do not love, it is because the love of God is not in us. Yet here is [David wrapping himself in a blanket in the love of God](#). God's covenant love. His promises. His protection. His care and kindness and compassion. And also, his vindication against his children's enemies.

What is this God that you worship? Is he not Love? Do you understand him to be personally loving to you? Has he forgiven you of your sins? Does he keep on doing it? Do you delight in it and tell others about this Loving God, or are you afraid of saying anything about that for fear that they

may get the wrong idea? This is the central point of the song. It is David's great confession in it. Is it yours?

Believe it or not, David now applies this very thought in the Psalm for you. **First**, notice **his entreaty**. “**Kill them not, lest my people forget; make them totter by your power and bring them down, O Lord, our shield!**” (Ps 59:11). In this case, he is not talking about destruction, not yet. He wants them to come to their senses, to be freed from their evil and to come to know the love of God themselves. So he asks God not to kill them, but to make them totter.

Steven Wright jokes, “**You know when you're sitting on a chair and you lean back so you're just on two legs and you lean too far so you almost fall over but at the last second you catch yourself? I feel like that all the time...**” His humor is always a paradox, if not a contradiction. That feeling is heart pounding! That is what it means to totter. When you totter like that, you want to fall forward, not backwards. Forward into the arms of a loving God, not backwards into the arms of justice and wrath.

Notice **second** that when David thinks of God's judgment, it is because **people deserve it**. “**For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their**

pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter, consume them in wrath; consume them till they are no more, that they may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth. Selah” (12-13). He does not seem to be asking God to destroy them here either. But rather to humble them (pride vs. till they are no more that they may know = humble them). Humble the wicked because he is evil. Humble him to bring him to the end of himself. Humble him to make him know that you are God. Use your wrath to make him want to know your mercy. This fits the heart that we know David had for Saul, as he would not kill him. Surely, the man who sang songs to the king wanted only for him to believe in the LORD and be saved.

Yet, “Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city” (14). Sound familiar? This actually becomes the refrain of the song! It is repeated from vs. 6. I’ve heard a lot of choruses in my day. I can honestly tell you, this is not among them.

They need their food. “They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their fill” (15). What is their food? The righteous! They feed off the godly, like the undead cannibals that that are.

What then is the hope? “I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress” (16; cf. 9-10a). He returns to earlier themes which keep him safe in the midst of danger. Singing about it helps ease the pain in his soul in the face of such sin.

“O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love” (17). The song begs for you to ask if you are your own strength, if something else in this world is your strength, or is God alone is your strength? Strong men take years to figure this out, for they have strength. But when you are helpless, when there is absolutely nothing you can do, God becomes your strength. And this is how you should view the strength in the days of your youth—as nothing compared to the loving kindness and strength of a God who protects you in Christ. You cannot be your own strength. Only God can.

A Just God with Different Motives

We are now in a position to answer the question raised at the beginning about a **God who would send a lying**

spirit to someone. How could he do this? Does this make God evil? No. And now we have seen why, through David! The first thing to understand is that God is completely sovereign. I mean absolutely sovereign. Nothing can thwart his will. And nothing is done in this universe by others without his approval—and even his decree. That means that whatever happens in the divine council or to the kings of the earth or to you, God is in control of it.

God is in control of it, meaning the God we have been looking at. The God of justice, righteousness, and also love and goodness. He does not set aside one attribute to show another. All are always present, always active.

Lying spirits exist. Therefore, they exist at the decree and forbearance of God—for now. They have not yet been finally punished. But God uses such creatures to punish evil on the earth. That is what we see happening in the Ahab story. Ahab is an incredibly wicked man. So God sends the lying spirit as judgment. For God is Judge. This is why it says, “**The LORD has declared disaster for you**” (1Kg 22:23). Punishing sin is never an unrighteous thing. In fact, it is perfectly good and just.

The problem comes not in God's judgment, but in **the will of the creature** that he uses to carry it out. The spirit in that story clearly does not have good motives, even as the spirit who goes into Saul does not have good motives. The spirit is a fallen, sinful creature. Just like Saul and Ahab are. But just because the spirit has a wicked intent, do not presume that God does. No, Joseph told his brothers, **what you intended for evil, God intended for good (Gen 50:20)**. One event. Two very different motives from two very different kinds of beings who are both agents in bringing it to pass. God is the first cause, the one sovereign over it. The brothers are the instrumental cause, the ones culpable for actually doing it.

What good could God possibly have in mind in sending out a lying spirit to deceive the prophets of Ahab? First, **that they might be judged** for their sins. Second, that some of them might see what David prayed that they would see, and **turn to God** because he cares about protecting his own people and vindicating them and his Great Name. In other words, the lying spirit is putty in God's hand. It can do what it wants, but it cannot turn God's motives evil, nor can it destroy his decree in what should ultimately happen. This is

what Psalms 58-59 are telling us to understand. We trust in God's judgment, even when we are in the midst of being attacked by great evil.

Psalm 60: Please, Don't Judge Your People, LORD

But what if God's judgment should turn upon ... us? What if God should happen to turn his eye of discipline upon us? How should we deal with it then? This is where Psalm 60 helps us.

Recall again that this psalm is written while David is away winning battles in the north, but the Edomites attack Israel from the south. Imagine it. David is carrying out the holy war as he was commanded to do, and for leaving Jerusalem unguarded to do God's will, God sends an attack against them! What is David's response?

“O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us” (Ps 60:1). The surety of the rejection is pictured in what happened. **“You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; repair its breaches, for it totters” (2).** **Now Israel is tottering!** **“You**

have made your people see hard things; you have given us
win to drink that made us stagger” (3). He returns to the
theme again in vs. 10, “**Have you not rejected us, O God?
You do not go forth, O God, with our armies.**” This is now
the refrain of Psalm 60.

Why would he think that God had rejected them? It is
undoubtedly because of their sin, for there is no other thing
in the Bible that would cause God to forsake the nation of
Israel. Somehow, they have sinned. Maybe it is something
David did himself. Now, God has turned against them just
as he turns against the wicked in the previous psalms. Do
you feel the very real problem this creates?

If you sin, how are you to deal with it if God decides to
discipline you for it? It happens. He does do this kind of a
thing. What is your response supposed to be? This is a deeply
personal question, but it can also be asked of groups. That is
what the Psalm has done. The “I” has turned to “us” (see vs.
1). If you sin and it effects a group (such things happened to
David on more than one occasion, was he blaming himself
here?) like a family or a city or a local church or a group of
churches, what is to be the response of all the people?

First, you are to **turn to Christ alone** for mercy. “**You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow. Selah**” (4). **Pause**. The word for a “banner” (*nes*) here is first used in the story of Moses fighting the Amalekites (giants; **Ex 17:15**). Moses has to hold up his arms in the shape of a cross and they will win (**Ex 17:12**). If his arms droop, the battle is lost.

Picking up the theme of **the cup** from **vs. 3**, **Caesarius of Arles** preached, “**When a person lays aside his past sinfulness, he is suddenly endowed with new dignity, with that cup of divine love of which it is said, ‘And your cup which inebriated me, how it overflows!’**”¹ Inebriated with that cup, I repeat, hearts taste the sweetness of heavenly things through the strength of spiritual wisdom. Then they may merit to hear, “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” (Sermon 167.1). And **Basil** said, “**We would not know that we were having these kindnesses done to us, unless ‘you have made us drink the wine of sorrow.’ By wine he means the words that lead the hardened heart to conscious perception**” (Homilies on the Psalms 20.3).

As for **the banner?** **Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Basil, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Jerome, Barnabas**, and others all saw

this banner as Christ: *Jehovah Nissi*—The LORD is my Banner.⁶ He is the banner who has been spread out for those who fear him. He is the banner to whom you flee after you fall into sin. He is the only banner, him and him alone. “That your beloved ones may be delivered [and] give[n] salvation by your right hand” (Ps 60:5). Christ is the Right Hand who has put himself up as this Banner by the decree of his Father in the power of the Spirit. When you turn back to him, your prayer must be “answer” (5), be it “me” or “us.” For he is the only hope that any of us have when God decides to discipline us for our sin. If you turn to anything else, there will be only ruin and destruction. Amalek will win. The war will be lost. He is the only hope you have of salvation in such a time as this.

But it is because of God’s delight and covenant promise to do this. “God has spoken in his holiness: ‘With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manesseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter. Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph’” (6-

⁶ See my sermon on Amalek in [Exodus 17:8-16](#).

7). Do you hear what this says? If you are his child, then you are his precious child. You are his. And he will fight for you, though he fights against you for a brief time. His wrath is but an instant, but his favor (grace) lasts forever.

But if you are not his, then he washes his hands with you and wipes his feet upon you and shouts over you in triumph. His favor is but an instant, and his wrath lasts forever. This is why you must return to your Lord, the precious Jesus Christ and be hidden under his banner alone.

Then he will lead his people onward to victory. “Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?” (9). The LORD will. “Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man! With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes” (11-12). The first foes are sin and the devil. The last is death. He will do all these things in his time. Therefore, wait upon him and call out to him in trust in your darkest hour of need. Flee to no one else, and know that his judgment is just, but his motives are good, and if you are his child—they will never end in terror or hatred or damnation or judgment or fear.

This is God’s word. What he tells you is true.