

**Sing beforehand:** Psalm 118:7<sup>i</sup>

-7-

Blest he who in the LORD's Name enters!  
We bless you from the house of God.  
He is our strength and our salvation;  
The LORD has shed His light abroad.  
Bind festal offerings to the altar;  
With sacrifices bring Him laud.  
Shout forth your joy within His temple.  
O praise the LORD, for He is God.

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth<sup>ii</sup>. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>iii</sup>. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Psalm 68:6<sup>iv</sup>

6-

Give praise to God with reverence deep;  
He daily comes our lives to keep  
And kindly bears our burdens.  
Our God upholds us in the strife;  
To us he grants eternal life  
And saves from all that threatens.  
God crushes heads of enemies;  
He brings them back from farthest seas  
For Israel's jubilation.  
He hears the needy when they cry;  
He saves their souls when death draws nigh:  
This God is our salvation.

Apostles Creed<sup>v</sup>

The Law<sup>vi</sup>

After the Law, we confess our sin before God and we pray for His forgiveness (Skrifberyming 9-11)<sup>vii</sup>

Prayer

- **Doxology:**
- **Worship:**
- **Confession:**

**Supplication (for pardon of sins):**

- **Thanksgiving:**
- **Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)**
- **General supplication:**
- **Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):**

**Amen.**

Psalm 72:6<sup>viii</sup>

6-

Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel;  
Wonders he works alone.  
Praised be his glorious name for ever;  
His name through earth be known.

Scripture reading: Ezekiel 21<sup>ix</sup>

Text: Ezekiel 21:12

**Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh.**

The last words we hear of the former Eden, is that Cherubs guard the entrance to the garden with the sword that flames and flickers, so that humans cannot enter there<sup>x</sup>.

- This flaming sword that flickers, is the symbol of God's punishment of man.
- Specified more closely:
  - It symbolises the death penalty pronounced over man, because had he wished to re-enter the garden, he would be killed with it.

- But it also symbolises God's punishment, which we will have to endure if we wish to have entrance to His sanctum again.

God's punishment of the sins of sinners is that dreadful!

- With a sword that flickers like lightning, He is going to work havoc amongst the unfaithful and the disobedient.
- After He has slain, only then will His wrath be reconciled.

This passage tells of two terrible things:

- Firstly, it reveals the fury of God. It relates God's vengeance due to our sin.
- But secondly, it also reveals that we will not be able to bear the punishment because it is too severe.
- Then we realise: Someone else will have to endure the punishment.

It is for exactly this reason that the Lord says to the prophet that we must cry and howl, as it has to do with our sin.

- We must however not cry and howl merely because we dishonour the Lord with our sin!
- We must howl and cry because these sins of ours will bring over us such awful violence!

Ezekiel already lived in Babel when he wrote down this prophecy.

- He was carried away together with the first group of Jews.
- Even though they were already in Babel, they still kept on hoping that Jerusalem would not be destroyed.

Then the Lord revealed to them that Jerusalem would indeed be destroyed! The Lord can do no different, because their sin is too much.

- The Lord portrays His fury as a sword.
- The sword will bring about the destruction of various nations, but especially of Jerusalem.

*Important: Notice the principle spelt out here! The judgment of God will not remain only outside of the church. It will also be pronounced over the church itself!*

The Jews in Babel understood the image of the sword very well. They knew Babel's military might intimately.

- But what had to have been a terrible shock to them was that the Lord was going to use precisely that, as the instrument of His judgement!
- The Jews reckoned everything outside of Jerusalem as being outside of heaven - at once, they had to now realise that the Lord had also the strength of the heathens in the service of His honour.

Thus the Lord announces His judgment.

- The heathens are so much in the service of God, that the Lord says that it is He, who draws His own sword.
- He is so angered, that He will not sheathe His sword.
  - He will slay with it continuously.
  - For those who do not want to hear, the worst suffering is yet to come.

Verse 7 describes us in our sin:

**And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD.**

The description has to do with two situations.

- First it describes how we landed into doing sin.
  - We were no match for evil.
  - We were unwilling.
  - Our hands and knees were not in the service of the Gospel.
- At the same time, it also describes the state that develops when we commit sin.
  - Our hearts melt from fear, when we are faced with God's anger at the sight of evil.
  - Hands limp in its impotence against the omnipotence of God. The hearts and souls of men become dull because the devil makes man increasingly blind to God's truth.

Thus everyone stands powerless before God. Thus Israel stood before God, and we too stand like them before the Lord. Powerless against God's punishment.

Then the Lord Himself starts to speak.

- He tells of a sword, which He has prepared. The sword is sharpened and polished.
- With great care the Lord prepares the sword, to thereby show that with equal care He will also exercise His wrath and execute His punishment.

It's frightening to think on it. Verse 11 says:

**And he (God) hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer.**

In the first instance the Lord is speaking of the Babylonians.

- To them the Lord lent the military might with which to kill the Israelites, and carry them away.
- But just so God gave the power and means to Satan, to one day mutilate disobedient people in hell.
- Satan is the one who kills. The one who has no interest in life.

Thus is the situation. That is why man must cry and howl.

- This judgment is not against the reprobate alone. It is against us too – God's people!
- Because stated plainly: we must be punished because we deserve to be.

What type of God would He be if He were to just look the other way in the face of all the unrighteousness?

- He forgives, but He also punishes! And the punishment is not easy.
- The sword is taken with both hands, and as they come forward, the people are then simply cut off.
- The people who appear, are cut in two at the hip. It is a shambles says the Bible.

In His punishment of man, God's judgment is like a lightning bolt.

**<sup>14</sup>Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite thine hands together. and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it is the sword of the great men that are slain, which entereth into their privy chambers.**

**<sup>15</sup>I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made bright, it is wrapped up for the slaughter.**

**<sup>16</sup>Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set.**

**<sup>17</sup>I will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said it.**

This punishment must be carried out to appease God's wrath.

That is what happened on Golgotha.

- The Lord did not want to cut down His elect with His shiny sharpened sword, as we would not have survived such a punishment.
- That is why the Lord Jesus Christ was punished in our stead. The wrath, which He had to carry, was similar to that of the described battlefield: terrible, cruel and bloody. So much so, that His blood even had to drip from the holes made by the nails.

All of this had to be, so that God's wrath would be appeased.

In Ezekiel the punishment is announced in four parts.

- From verses 8 tot 11 the sword is portrayed as the killing power.
  - The speed at which the people in Jerusalem will fall, is described. They are the people inside the church.
  - There were those Jews who thought that those inside of Jerusalem would suffer no punishment. Just so, there are those people who think that it's more than enough to belong to a church.
  - Your end is not averted by your membership to the church. Everyone – those inside and those outside of the church – disobedient to God, are punished.
- The second part is sketched in verse 12. Everyone must lament. In God's fury, there is place for only tears and heartache.
- The third part of the punishment is described in verses 14 to 15a.
  - The sword must now be taken in both hands, and with the speed of a lightning bolt must be wielded this way and that.
  - The murderousness of the sword is tripled.
- The fourth part is drawn in verse 15 to 17.
  - The sword does not cease. It continues until God's fury is satisfied.
  - Here the judgment is presented so powerfully that another is no longer wielding the sword. It is God Himself.

This punishment describes to us what all happened from Jesus Christ's birth, until His death on the cross.

- Satan's temptations became increasingly fierce.
- The wrath of God all the greater, until it reached it's height when the Lord Jesus hung on the cross and cried that even God had forsaken Him.

It gets dark - pitch black in broad daylight. So severe was the punishment that Jesus had to suffer for our sake, that not even the sun could give its light.

This is the grace and mercy we must remember each day - mercy that God grants us through the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The fact that Jesus Christ took upon Himself all of the punishment for all God's people.
- When in our grief, we were supposed to have cried and howled because we were denied entry into heaven, and because we could also not bear the terrifying wrath of God - He took God's wrath upon Himself.

Now we must rightly howl and cry for joy because Jesus bore this terrible anger, and because our sin is thereby forgiven.

- Now God's wrath is appeased.
- Now our place in His eternal dwelling is prepared.

**Amen.**

Prayer.

We thank you, Almighty God, that you removed our grief from us, and that Jesus Christ bore it on our behalf. Grant us a true appreciation of His terrible suffering for our sake. Grant us a living hope of eternal life.

**Amen.**

Psalm 89 : 1

1-

I will extol Thee, LORD, Thy mercies I will praise,  
 And of Thy steadfast love I'll sing through all my days.  
 LORD, with my mouth I will to ev'ry generation  
 Proclaim Thy faithfulness with joyful adoration.  
 Thy steadfast love Thou hast established, LORD, forever;  
 Thy faithfulness is firm, Thy cov'nant changes never.

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:  
 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace<sup>xi</sup>.

**Amen.**

Dr. M.J. du Plessis  
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 Date: 20 June 2010

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs118\\_Helder1972.HTM](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs118_Helder1972.HTM)

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 124:8

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:3

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.genevanpsalter.com/music-a-lyrics/1-individual-psalms/109-psalm-68>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/apostles.creed.html>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2020:1-17&version=KJV>

<sup>vii</sup> Ons het, o HEER, u wet weerstrewe, genade is al waar ons op pleit; gee ons in Christus nuwe lewe, om dit te doen uit dankbaarheid.

<sup>viii</sup> [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs072\\_Koyzis.HTM](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs072_Koyzis.HTM)

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ezeziel%2021&version=KJV>

<sup>x</sup> Genesis 3:24

<sup>xi</sup> Numbers 6:24-26