



## Feature

# More Reflections on the Psalms of Enmity and Vengeance




Simon Cheung

Assistant Professor  
(Biblical Studies)

As the name suggests, psalms of enmity and vengeance are prayer psalms that invoke curses on the enemies<sup>1</sup>. The curses all originated from the lips of the persecuted psalmist. Such psalms have always been difficult and, no doubt, the substance of the imprecation was not desirable. The most notable psalm of enmity should be none other than Psalm 137:8-9, *“Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction. Happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.”* This psalm advocates revenge, even against innocent children. The moral standard was shocking. Psalm 69:22-29 was not any better. Verses 22-25 made a clean sweep and cast curses on the pleasures, health, faith and the next generation of the enemies. This is embarrassing for a faith based on love and forgiveness. However, does this mean that the Scripture should not include such psalms?

Perhaps we are just paranoid about psalms of enmity? We have always placed our focus on the curses that most catch our attention, and overlook the fact that they do not represent the entirety of the psalm. Taking Psalm 137 as an example, the attention of the readers may be focused on the prayer for retribution on Babylon and ignores the curses self-imposed by the psalmist. Verses 5-6 contain two sets of oaths sworn on the psalmist himself, *“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget.....! May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy!”* (a direct translation). The psalmist would rather deliver up his passion for music than to sacrifice his loyalty to Jerusalem. The wellbeing of Jerusalem was so close to his heart that he pledged his love to it. It is therefore not difficult to understand the intense pain that he felt when his beloved was violated. The outcry for vengeance was not just to instigate a quarrel, nor was it an outburst that got out of control due to great rage. Instead, it was made to uphold the essence of his values, something that he would be prepared to sacrifice his life for.

Psalm 69 also expresses a strong plea of the psalmist, an appeal for authentic faith, behind the cursing language. Verses 22-25 mentioned above list out the psalmist’s desire for the demise of his enemies. Verses 26-30 explain why he so desired. These verses adopt a chiastic structure: the words “pain” and “distress” in v26 and v29 derive from the same Hebrew root “sorrow”. The bearer of “sorrow” from the enemies’ continuous attacks and wilful ridicules and mockeries was the psalmist himself. Verses 27-28 compose the central part of this passage, in which the psalmist prayed that these wicked people *“cannot enter into your (God’s) righteousness”* and *“will not be listed in the book of life with the righteous”* (a direct translation). The curses that the psalmist proclaimed on his foes were caused by his persistent quest for righteousness. The wicked should not be seated together with the righteous. Otherwise, a perfunctory existence and a leisurely life of the wicked could signify that God’s judgment was meaningless, or might even mean that God might be viewing such wicked people as righteous. It is only when their final destiny was like what the psalmist described that God’s justice could be displayed. Endless curses did not just represent retribution, but was an expression of faith in God. If the psalmist did not truly believe that God was faithful on His promises, why should he use such full-blown language to bring out the fact that our God who punishes the wicked and bless the righteous is a truly just God? It is worth noting that in the verses that follow the curses in verses 22-29, the psalmist excitedly proclaimed that he could wholeheartedly glorify God with thanksgiving (v30-31)<sup>2</sup>. It is only when the psalmist could unreservedly lay down all his negative emotions before the God whom he trusted that his commitment to trust God can be found, which in turn led him to worship God in heart and spirit. By contrast, if he felt the need to come before God under pretense, that would only take him further away from God. Then gradually, the praises that came out of his mouth would no longer be words from his heart<sup>3</sup>.

Is it appropriate to read such psalms in a corporate worship? It is my view that we should. Reading psalms of enmity means that there is space for disappointment and anger in the worship. In an era filled with unrighteousness and violence, church congregations have to be able to worship truthfully while being in touch with reality. They cannot ignore the existence of suffering, yet in an environment that advocates retributory violence, the psalmists chose to hand back the sovereignty on retaliation to the Lord whom they prayed. Regardless of how he and his loved ones had been ravaged by evil and brutality, he would not want to be the executioner of punishment. Although his pains had not healed and problems were still unresolved, the psalmist would wait for God to restore things to order. The word “wait” in Hebrew (יָחַל) incorporates the meaning of “hope”. A corporate recital of psalms of enmity is an action to bring about hope, especially during an insane age filled with power corruption, rampant violence and perversion. Powerless people in a society will all the more need to recite psalms of enmity so that their roars of rage can be heard, but at the same time ensure that they would not be consumed by the desire to take vengeance as they would wait for the return of their covenantal God. He will restore and make everything new. 

#### Extended Reading:

- Ellington, Scott A. *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 98. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008.
- Zenger, Erich. *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

<sup>1</sup> Examples include Psalms 12, 58, 83, 109, 129 and so forth.

<sup>2</sup> Looking at the structure of the entire Psalm, v7-12 describes the enemies of the psalmist, v22-29 sets out the curses pronounced by the psalmist on them, and the final part where the psalmist proclaims praises to God (v30-31) echoes with each other.

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly N. Snow and Mark R. McMinn, ‘Resolving Anger Toward God: Lament As an Avenue Toward Attachment’, *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 39 (2011): 130-42.



# The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Thanksgiving Service in Philadelphia, USA

**Daniel Law**

Director of Development  
DipCS 2014

Being part of CGST's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, thanksgiving services were held in four cities. They were arranged in Vancouver (Canada), Sydney (Australia) and Hong Kong respectively, and the last thanksgiving service was at the Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, USA which held a special place in our heart.

Although Philadelphia, USA is about 13,000 km away from Hong Kong, half a century ago four Chinese divinity students of the Westminster Theological Seminary prayed together for the burden that the Lord had ignited in their hearts for China, and that started a movement for the launching of theological education in Asia.

In November 2015, around 80 friends and supporters of CGST from North America and Hong Kong gathered together to praise God for His amazing grace and provision through hymns, prayers, sermon and sharing. The Chairman of the US Board Dr Ching Lau recalled how CGST started half a century ago through a vision shared by four divinity

students. One of them, Rev Che-Bin Tan, also shared how the Lord guided them step by step to launch CGST. He admitted that they were just a group of idealistic youngsters at the time, yet God used them to establish a seminary for university graduates.

Our President Emeritus Rev Dr Wilson Chow was the youngest of these four Chinese divinity students. He used Deuteronomy 8:11-20 to encourage the congregation not to forget the vision and mission that God has given CGST, and firmly believed that the establishment of CGST was a movement to bring about theological education to equip and train leaders of strong academic standards for Chinese churches generally and in particular in Mainland China. The past forty years that CGST has gone through was entirely God's grace and provision. We should therefore not boast about individual achievement but should move forward unremittingly. The Israelites were reminded not to worship idols but only to God. Rev Dr Chow told the CGST community not to overly uplift our vision while embracing it. Otherwise, our vision may

become our idol.

After the sermon, Dr Ching Lau led the congregation to light up the small lamps which CGST gifted to each of them. About 100 small lights were shining in the hall and symbolised that CGST's mission would be upheld and passed on.

Towards the end, CGST President Rev Dr Stephen Lee shared his outlook of CGST's future. He reiterated that CGST's vision originated from a burden for China and that has remained unchanged. He also shared that some faculty members who have retired or soon retire have been considering settling down in China to devote the rest of their lives towards theological education in Mainland China. This gives a glimpse of the dedication of CGST to nurture workers for theological education in China. He hoped that supporters of CGST could continue to give their support in prayers, and that the Lord will lead the future path of CGST. [▶](#)



President Emeritus Wilson Chow delivered an address at the Thanksgiving Service.



Fellowship after the Thanksgiving Service.



Rev Dr & Mrs Wilson Chow together with Rev Dr & Mrs Che-Bin Tan at Jonathan Chao Center in Westminster Theological Seminary.



President Stephen Lee shared CGST's latest news and development with the Canadian and US Boards



Guests and CGST community in North America gathered at The Thanksgiving Service.





Wilson W Chow

President Emeritus

# Faithful to the Vision, Passing on the Mission

My sharing today is about the vision and mission of the earlier generation. I believe God is giving a greater vision to the second and third generations, at the same time renewing our original vision, so that the School will move on with the times and respond to new situations. A series of books came out in the 1970s-1980s entitled "I Believe", such as "I Believe in the Church", "I Believer in Evangelism". I can best describe CGST's vision as "I Believe in Theological Education". Theological education is not just one among the church's many ministries. It is the indispensable one which produces the manpower for the various ministries.

Some important beliefs of the CGST vision became fully developed when we put our mission into practice. I would like to share five aspects today:

First, CGST's vision and mission is for theological education to serve the Church. Different from religious studies at universities, theological education aims to train leaders for the Church. Theological study is not an end in itself, nor is it a personal interest, but it is for equipping oneself for church ministries, building up God's Church and extending His kingdom. Therefore, the success of theological education is measured by its impact and contributions to the Church. CGST was formed with the needs of China's churches in mind, considering how they may be blessed. We began with training pastors and lay leadership and we have held on to this mission over the past 40 years, nurturing spiritual leaders for the Church.

Second, CGST's vision and mission is to provide holistic training that integrates the academic, spiritual and practical. Four decades ago, when CGST started training university graduates, there were people who felt, and some even criticized, that since academic requirement was raised, we were 'neglecting the spiritual', as if the spiritual and the academic are diametrically opposite. And since Chinese churches traditionally emphasize on spirituality,

this concern was understandable. Yet we believe that not only were the two not in opposition, they should be integrated into a whole. It is not a balance of equal portions, but a fully integrated reality. Dr Philip Teng once said, "CGST is a testing ground for holistic integration. We cannot afford to fail." Today the holistic approach is widely accepted in theological education.

Third, CGST's vision and mission is to pursue excellence. This is a goal as well as a challenge. Excellence is not about comparing with other people or boasting to be the best seminary. That is not excellence but vanity. Excellence is about striving to do one's best, not accepting mediocrity but offering our best to God, loving Him with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength. Excellence stems from our attitude, expressing in action. We seek to be conscientious in learning, truthful in spirituality, and faithful in ministering.

Fourth, our vision and mission needs to be both forward looking and pragmatic, fulfilling our dreams and ideals with practical involvement. CGST is a school, but it also represents a movement to advance theological training. We need to build up an institution as a visible sign of the movement, yet be alert to the ills of institutionalization, in terms of rigidity and aging. At the same time, we promote theological education beyond our own School with a wider perspective and concern, willing to learn from and work with others. Only so can we maintain our vitality. "Think global, act local" sums up our belief.

CGST has been an advocate for several movements in the past. Our very existence is a call to university graduates to dedicate themselves to God for the ministry. We began a Diploma Program for graduates and offered evening extension courses whereby theological studies are open to lay Christians. A theological training program for the grassroots called Jifu was designed and operated, with several classes of graduates, before it went independent

and gave birth to another organization. Other creative ministries include theological training for homemakers, programs in Mandarin, and for those in the marketplace. Lately the Word of Life Bible Study movement encourages believers to study God's Word and has been received with great enthusiasm. We must not be content with what we are doing. We need to be spiritually discerning to see the needs of the people and step forward as the Spirit moves and leads us.

Lastly, CGST's vision and mission is to serve the Church in China. We are rooted in Hong Kong yet committed to serving China. The challenge is immense. We must have our own orientation and know where we stand. We are part of China but we are not in the mainland. We follow the One Country Two Systems policy. As a seminary, we wish to get in touch with our counterparts, that is, theological schools in China. Over the years, we have had opportunities to visit schools, have mutual exchange, attend conferences and have been invited to teach short term. All these help to build up friendship and trust. It is a blessing that we can share our experience and resources in theological education with the church leadership in China. It is exciting to receive qualified applications from China for our Mandarin programs, and we have accepted pastors and seminary teachers recommended by the national TSPM/CCC to come for further studies. We hope the door to serve remains open and our partnership continues.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." (John 14:12) May the second and third generations of teachers and students carry on our vision and continue with the mission. I also believe that you will do greater things. 🌱

(This is an excerpt of Rev Dr Wilson Chow's talk at the 'Chapel Service Celebrating CGST's 40th Anniversary' on September 15, 2015.)



Stephen Lee

President



## I believe in the *communion of saints*

In a recent Chapel service at CGST, we were overrun by 15 minutes because of the numerous announcements. Before the end of the gathering, a representative from the student union led the staff and student community to pray together for the Syrian war and the refugees. During the moment of silence, I recalled an article just received a few days ago written by my friend, a Christian brother-in-Christ from the Middle East.

This article was posted on the website of "Lausanne Movement"<sup>1</sup>. Based on the concern of personal safety, the author did not disclose his name. I remembered when I met him 13 years ago; we talked about the history of the faith community he belonged to, which could be traced back to the church at Antioch in Acts chapter 11. As pointed out in his article, "The Arab Christian Church has survived from the Day of Pentecost to now, nearly 2,000 years. It has had some good times as well as bad. It has survived pressure and persecution."

Christians form 10% of the Syrian population — they were well-educated, and held good positions in business, education, and government. Suddenly everything has been turned upside down in the past four to five years. A city in the middle of Syria was repeatedly bombarded. The Christian community was no exception. The Presbyterian Church over there was the largest church in Syria, but 80-90% of Christians have been displaced. Although no one has exact numbers, some 400,000 to 500,000 Christians have become refugees. Ever since 2011, there were

some 45 terrorist groups in Syria. They wanted to separate and took over the country by force. Even after the ceasefire, it is not optimistic that Christians can rebuild their homes. The Islamic State (IS) is committed to control and destroy all the Christian communities step by step in their territories.

In the midst of trials and suffering, God still has His wonderful purpose. Christians in the Middle East no longer work for their own interest. Coptic churches in Egypt are praying for the believers in Iraq for the first time; five church networks in Syria engage in various domestic humanitarian aid. Lebanon hosts 1.5 million refugees, among them 400,000 are refugee children. Local churches seek to provide medical care, food, education and other resources for them. Over the years, caring for people of other faiths was not a priority of the church. However, in view of the crisis today, evangelism and social action should go hand in hand, which is an indisputable consensus among the leaders and believers.

War has forced the church to face the needs of Muslims: these refugees are at their doorstep waiting for help. Undoubtedly, many Muslims support the aspirations of the IS. They are disappointed with the present state of the government and many people yearn to restore the glorious history in the past. Such a mentality is easy to fall into extreme terrorism. On the other hand, some Muslims who have moderate views doubt whether this is the authentic Islam they believe in. Quite a number of them come to Christ when the gospel is presented to them.

Lebanese and Syrian pastors said that in the last two to three years, they have seen more Muslims come to faith in Christ than in their whole lives.

Some Lebanese churches have a separate Sunday worship service for the Muslim Background Believers (MBB) among the Syrian refugees. In one church, 80% of the refugee congregations are converts who have now been baptized. Some came from northern Syria where IS is in control and Christians would never have dared to go. Now they came to Lebanon and Jordan to hear the gospel. The author mentioned about a very strict Muslim whom he knew personally and has now become a committed Christian.

Church should be prepared to continue to witness Christ in the reality of persecution, but not be discouraged or dismayed. The church can still trust in God's sovereignty and goodness in the midst of very difficult circumstances, even if we cannot understand what is going on. A Syrian MBB, who was in prison for ten days in solitary confinement, said afterwards that he was expecting a miracle from God to open the doors, but instead he had a clear vision of the presence of God in the cell. An almost audible voice said to him: 'False witnesses and close friends brought you here; they did the same to me on the cross.' He said God's presence was enough for him. 🌱

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2016-01/the-crisis-in-syria>



# Campus News

## The President Office

- President Stephen Lee was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee of Hong Kong Theological Education Association (HKTEA) for one year during their Annual General Meeting on February 19.
- President Lee was invited by Kowloon West district of The Methodist Church, Hong Kong, to preach at the Maundy Thursday Communion Service on March 24.
- President Lee visited Toronto and Vancouver between May 18 and 31 to preach at the CGST North America Revival Seminar, Vision-sharing dinner, Pastoral Luncheon, Sunday Service as well as meeting with local Regional Council members and supporters.
- Vice President Kang Phee Seng attended The Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) in Frankfurt, Germany, from May 16 to 20. “The Future of Theological Education: Serving the Church and Its Mission” was the theme of the Forum.
- Vice President Kang was invited to speak at the Justice Conference Asia 2016 hosted by The Vine Centre, Hong Kong between May 13 and 14.
- Vice President Luke Cheung was invited to attend the China Theological Association Symposium in Shanghai on March 28.

## Faculty Engagements

- Dr Annie Pan Ng accepted the invitation to attend and lead workshop at the Theological Students Day organized by Hong Kong Theological Students Prayer Fellowship on February 19.
- Dr Simon Cheung was invited by Shatin Baptist Church to teach a series of classes on Psalm and Contemporary Hong Kong on February 19, 26 and March 4.
- Rev Dr Kin Yip Louie attended the Annual Meeting of World Reformed Fellowship Board in Indonesia between March 6 and 12, during which he also participated in a series of Theological Seminars. “Reformed Theology and its Contribution to the World” was the theme of the seminars.
- Dr Simon Cheung attended the Langham Partnership International Research Conference at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, between March 13 and 18.

- Dr Raymond Au is on leave for research writing from February to July.
- Dr Daniel Lee was invited to speak at the forum on reflections on violence / just war hosted by Public Ethics Education and Research on March 17.
- Dr Bernard Wong was invited to speak at a youth theological seminar hosted by Christian & Missionary Alliance Church Union of Hong Kong on April 15.

## Staff News

- Mr Kwok Kuen Leung went to Los Angeles, Seattle in the US and Vancouver in Canada to preach at revival meetings, to attend volunteer sharing gatherings and preach at Sunday services between Feburary 19 and March 1. Mr Leung also visited Melbourne, Brisbane, and Canberra for the same from March 5 to 14.
- Rev Dr Song Jun, Director of Chinese Culture Research Center, was invited to speak at a public lecture co-hosted by the Center for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Society for the Study of History of Christianity in China on February 2. “Making Choices in the Midst of Change: The End of the National Christian Council of China (1949-1951)” was the topic of the public lecture.
- Mrs Doreen Chan came on board on April 1 to become the Executive Consultant of Word of Life Ministry.

## Revival Seminar in North America

- President Lee preached at the CGST North America Revival Seminar on May 19. Being held at Richmond Hill Chinese Christian Church in Toronto, the Seminar was simulcast and video broadcast to 27 locations in 19 cities in North America.

## In Memoriam

- The late Mr Michael Wong, retired Board member of the Australian Board, passed away on April 17 in Sydney. The memorial service was held at the Christian Assembly of Sydney on April 23. Our deepest sympathy is with the Wong’s family.

## Graduation Exercises and Dinner

- The Thirty-ninth Graduation Exercises is to be held at the Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church

at 3:00pm on June 25, Saturday. Rev Dr Wilson Chow, CGST President Emeritus, addressed the convocation. Graduation Dinner is to be held at Paramount International Banquet Hall in Kowloon Bay in that evening.

## Prayer Items

1. Pray for the students who are graduating in June, that God will grant those entering full time ministry a humble heart to serve in faithfulness wherever God places them. Pray also for those who have completed the evening part time programs. May God use them to integrate what they have learnt in their workplace and to witness Christ in their professions.
2. Pray for the applicants who are being considered for the new school year. May God direct the selection process and give wisdom to the Admission Committee members.

## Save Trees

Subscribe to electronic version of CGST English Bulletin

Thank you for subscribing to our print edition of English Bulletin. More trees are being torn down when we continue to print the quarterly Bulletin. We now would like to invite you to take part in protecting the environment by subscribing to our electronic version.



You can simply visit [https://www.cgst.edu/ebulletin\\_eng](https://www.cgst.edu/ebulletin_eng) and fill in the information as requested. From next issue onwards, you will receive an email notification to view the electronic version of the English Bulletin. Thank you for making an effort to save the earth!

## General Fund Financial Report Jan to Apr, 2016

General Fund	US\$
Donations	1,318,056
Tuition & other income	959,669
	2,277,725
Expenditure	(2,251,985)
Surplus	25,740
Outstanding mortgage loan as at Apr, 2016 : US\$ (2,137,516)	

# Response

- ☐ Please send me the CGST Chinese Bulletin
- ☐ Please send me the CGST Quarterly English Bulletin
- ☐ I would like to donate to CGST \$\_\_\_\_\_ (specify currency)

Please use it for

### General Fund

- ☐ Graduate Programs
- ☐ Word of Life Ministry
- ☐ Faculty Support
- ☐ Others \_\_\_\_\_

### Restricted Fund

- ☐ China Mainland Theological Education Development Fund
- ☐ Student Scholarships

Rev./Dr./Mr./Mrs./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Zip/postal code: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Donation by cheque

Cheque No. \_\_\_\_\_

Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque payable to:

– “China Graduate School Theology” (for Hong Kong)

– “CGST” (for USA – please send to our US office)

– “CACGST” (for Canada – please send to our Canada address)

2. Donation by Credit Card\*

☐ Visa    ☐ MasterCard

Credit Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_ (MM/YY)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

\*Note:

1. Tax deductible receipts issued to Hong Kong and Canada credit card donations.

2. For US credit card donation and receipts issued by U.S. please go to <http://www.cgstus.org/donation.php>

Please direct your response to one of the followings:

HONG KONG	U.S.A.	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
<b>China Graduate School of Theology</b> 12 Dorset Crescent, Kowloon, Hong Kong	<b>U.S. Office China Graduate School of Theology</b> P.O. Box 1565, Mountain View, CA 94042-1565, U.S.A. Tel: (650) 938 2478 Email: <a href="mailto:office@cgstus.org">office@cgstus.org</a>	<b>CACGST</b> P.O. Box 72128 Old Orchard P.O. 31-4429 Kingsway, Burnaby B.C. V5H 4P9 Canada	<b>Australian Board</b> China Graduate School of Theology P.O. Box 32, Enfield, NSW 2136 Australia