



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 13

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Introduction

- There has been a progress of absolute intensity from Psalm 10 through Psalm 12
- This psalm continues to strengthen the intensity of David's crying out to the Lord for help and relief
- In Psalm 12 we saw David feeling that he is alone, such that all the faithful and godly had disappeared
- But if it was not bad enough that David felt that all the godly had abandoned him, now we read that David also feels that God has abandoned him



Introduction

- From the title we learn the author of this Psalm (David) and how it was to be used 'To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.' Or, (in the corporate assembly, as led by the choirmaster)
- Some believe that the Chief Musician is the Lord God Himself, and others suppose him to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:33,16:5-7,25:6)
- This is a psalm of transition; from the darkness of despair (Psalm 13:1-2) the Psalmist wins his way through prayer (Psalm 13:3-4) to a joyous hope of ultimate deliverance (Psalm 13:5-6)



Introduction

- This Psalm contains the sentiments of an afflicted soul that earnestly desires comfort from the Lord
- Some scholars think this psalm has been written when he was trying to escape from Saul
- Others, think the psalm was added during Absalom's rebellion, when David ran away from his son's face
- They believe the reason for that is that what happened to David from Saul was before his sin, and therefore he could speak with great boldness
- But what occurred to him from Absalom was after it, and therefore mourning and groans were mixed with his words



Introduction

- And some think it cannot be referred to any especial event or period in David's history
- All we can be certain about is that the psalm is intense in its record of personal feeling



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Expressions of Despair 13:1-2
- Earnest Prayer 13:3-4
- Song of Faith 13:5-6



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- David could not understand why the Lord was delaying the help he desperately needed.. and so his heart was grieving, and his soul cried out in bitterness and distress - *How long, O Lord?*
- David felt that the enemy was triumphing over him while the Lord seemed to have distanced Himself far away from His faithful servant.. and so he challenged the Lord with multiple questions
- *How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- The pain in David's heart came from a sense that God had forgotten him and that God was distancing Himself from him
- The first *How long*, that he seemed to be *forgotten*
- The second referred to here is, that God seemed to hide His face from him, and he asked how long this was to continue
- No doubt, David had faced worse circumstances but had faced them more bravely when he had sensed the presence of God with him
- Yet now, feeling distant from God, it did not take much to send David into despair



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- God cannot forget, but man often feels as if he were forgotten
- *How long?* This question is repeated no less than four times
- Some think the four times repetition show that the psalmist cries out not in his own personal name, but rather on behalf of the entire nation that fell as prisoners of war four times; the Babylonian imprisonment, the Persian or Medianites, the Greek one and the Roman imprisonment
- *How long shall I take counsel*, No wonder David was discouraged!
- Taking counsel in his own soul had led him to *sorrow in his heart daily*



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- When one is discouraged and depressed, the answer is not in looking inside himself, but in looking to the Lord
- He is continually thinking of ways and means of deliverance; but they all come to nothing, because God did not come to his deliverance
- When a soul feels the burden and guilt of sin, it tries numerous approaches of self-recovery; but they are all useless
- None but God can speak peace to a guilty conscience
- *How long will my enemy*, David was depressed in his relationship with God, within himself, and in regard to his enemies



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- *How long will my enemy be exalted over me?* This may be understood either of temporal enemies, and was true of David when he was obliged to leave his own house and family, the land of Judea, and flee to the Philistines as well as when he fled from Absalom his son
- Or, it may be understood by spiritual enemies, Satan appears to triumph
- Pressure from spiritual and natural enemies can push us toward depression



Expressions of Despair 13:1-2

- St. John Chrysostom comments on these two verses saying, “Nothing, after all, brings remembrance by God so much as doing good, being sober and watchful, practicing virtue; likewise, nothing prompts forgetting so much as living in sin and giving oneself to greed and rapacity. So for your part, dearly beloved, when you are in trouble, do not say, ‘God has forgotten me,’ but when you are living in sin and everything is going favorably for you. After all, if you knew this, you would quickly abandon evil things.”



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- David will not allow himself to be *forgotten*; he will recall himself to God's remembrance *Consider and hear me, O Lord my God*
- *Consider and hear me*, literally, *Look, hear me*
- David is asking God, instead of hiding Your face, answer me and instead of forgetting my need *Enlighten my eyes* Revive me
- God had seemed to hide His face as if He would not even look upon him Psalm 13:1; and the psalmist now prays that He *would* look upon him
- *O Lord my God*, A cry of faith; a faith that is not destroyed by all trials and sorrows
- Despite of all his suffering, God is still his God



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- David had the wisdom to know that though he felt powerful feelings, his vision was clouded and dark, so he cried out to God, *Enlighten my eyes*
- The allusion here is, probably, to his exhaustion, arising from trouble and despair, as if he were about to die
- The sight grows dim as death approaches; and he seemed to feel that death was near
- David is praying that God would intervene and save him from that death which he felt was rapidly approaching
- This was a great prayer; we need the light of God to shine upon us and to give us His wisdom and knowledge



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- St. Paul knew the importance of having our eyes enlightened by the Lord
- This is what he prayed for Christians: *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power* (Ephesians 1:17-19)



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- If we are not enlightened by God, we will surely fall asleep
- And often, spiritual *sleep* leads to spiritual *death*
- St. Cyril the Great says, “To draw closer to the true light, I mean to Christ we praise Him in the psalms saying “enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death”. The death of the soul is the real death, and it is not the physical death. Real death is when we fall short of the true and straight edification and when we choose falsehood instead of truth. Therefore we have to be well-girdled, and our lanterns lit brightly as we have been told.”



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- With this enlightenment, there is no place for darkness in the soul, or in the body or mind or heart; rather, all what is inside us is enlightened by the Lord
- Another plea is urged in verse 4
- There would be a general rejoicing on the part of all his enemy, if they succeeded in seriously injuring him
- The triumph of David's enemy over him, whether Saul or anyone else, would be the triumph of evil over good, of those who had cast God behind their back over those who faithfully served Him



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- If he died, his enemy, who was also the Lord's enemy, since David was God's representative, would conclude he had overcome him and would rejoice
- He could therefore appeal to God - not in his own personal interest, but in the interest of truth and right, and the general good of mankind - to prevent his enemy's triumph
- It is not the Lord's will that the great enemy of our souls should overcome his children
- Knowing how his enemies would delight over his fall, David was even more determined to not be *moved*



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- When moved from his steadfastness and overcome by sin
- Or, *moved* from his house and family, from his country and kingdom, from a prosperous state and condition to a distressed one; at which David's enemy would rejoice
- The things that trouble God's people are Satan and the world
- Satan and the world rejoice when God's children are in a difficult and afflicted condition
- Satan rejoices when he gains his purpose of moving them from any degree of steadfastness, of faith and hope, or from the ways of God in any respect



Earnest Prayer 13:3-4

- St. Augustine comments on this verse saying, “The devil’s mockery is to be feared. “They that trouble me will exult, if I be moved;” the devil and his angels; who exulted not over that righteous man, Job, when they troubled him; because he was not moved, that is, did not draw back from the steadfastness of his faith.”
- Who is this enemy that the psalmist fears he would over-power him and put him to shame?
- He is the devil or iniquity
- He fears the scorn of his enemies, who thrill over him if he is moved away from his faith



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- David's confidence and his faith in God have changed his affliction to a joyful song of praise
- The most complete peace has taken the place of the despair
- After his prayer, he came to a place of confidence and trust
- Faith has triumphed
- He can look forward with confidence
- *I have trusted* speaks in the past tense; it is as if David remembered that he really did trust God, and he cleared away the fog from his sleepy eyes as God enlightened his eyes



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- The faith, hope, and comfort of the psalmist grew and increased by prayer
- From complaining he goes to praying, from praying to believing
- He trusted not in himself, not in his own heart, nor in his own righteousness and merits, but in the mercy of God
- And the idea here is, *I have trusted in the mercy of God; I still trust, and I will trust forever*
- There is no true joy but of the heart
- And the heart cannot rejoice till all guilt is taken away from the conscience



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- St. Augustine says, “But I have hoped in Thy mercy” Because this very thing, that a man be not moved, and that he abide fixed in the Lord, he should not attribute to self: lest when he glories that he hath not been moved, he be moved by this very pride. “My heart shall exult in Thy salvation;” in Christ, in the Wisdom of God. “I will sing to the Lord who hath given me good things;” spiritual good things.”
- *My heart shall rejoice*, He directed his feelings instead of having his feelings direct him
- *I will sing to the Lord*, Singing to the Lord would both *express* his joy and *increase* his joy



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- David moved from being depressed and feeling abandoned by God, to singing joy
- *Because He has dealt bountifully with me*, As David thought about it, he had good reason to rejoice and sing, because God had been good to him
- In the beginning of the Psalm, David was overwhelmed by his feelings and believed that God forgot him and was hiding from him
- He had trouble with God, with himself, and with others



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- Yet now he sees how God had *dealt bountifully with him*
- Because his eyes were enlightened, David could now see God's goodness
- Before God can enlighten our eyes, we must agree that we do not see everything
- We need to realize that our feelings are not giving us full and accurate information
- But if we cry out to the Lord, He will enlighten our eyes and bring us from a place of despair to a place of trust, joy, and confidence



Song of Faith 13:5-6

- As if he is saying, “I will exchange my cry of despair, "How long?" for a joyful song of thanksgiving; because already I am cheered, I am revived - the Lord *has dealt bountifully with me*”
- And this mental revival is an assurance of deliverance to come
- What a beautiful way to end this Psalm
- The sorrow we feel when we are convinced that God has forgotten us, is quickly turned to joy and thanksgiving when we remember all the blessings He has showered upon us



Discussion

- How could verses 1-2 be encouraging for someone going through a deep struggle of faith? In what ways could these verses be discouraging?
- Describe David's pessimistic prayer in verses 3-4. Should not a follower of God always pray with optimism? Why or why not?
- Compare the last line of this Psalm with the first line. How can both of these comments be true?



Discussion

- What does this Psalm teach us?
- How are you aiming to apply Psalm 13 to your life? How does this passage transform your thoughts, desires and/or actions?
- How does this Psalm teach us to worship God?
- Briefly describe the process we go through as we move from worry to worship