

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 22

Bishop Youssef

- This is another psalm with a title: To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Deer of the Dawn." A Psalm of David
- > There are some views on the meaning of 'the deer of the dawn'
- ➤ It may be a phrase which suggests a name of an instrument, or a particular tune to which the psalm was to be sung
- ➤ Others think it resembles the redeeming work of the Lord Christ to a wounded innocent deer, on which dawn comes with healing and release just as our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was wounded on the cross, to proclaim His glory by resurrection at the dawn of Sunday



- Another view says that according to the old Jewish tradition, this expression refers to the glorious cloud that used to appear in the midst of the people of God
- ➤ Also, according to the tradition, the lamb was offered as a morning sacrifice
- > This Psalm is like a gem among the Psalms and is remarkable
- ➤ It begins with the most anguished and sorrowful cry in human history, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- And a Christian cannot read this psalm without reflecting on the use of the first verse by Christ on the Cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)



- ➤ It contains those deep, moving, and intense sufferings of Christ
- There are 13 references to this Psalm in the New Testament; 9 out of them are about the suffering of Christ on the cross
- ➤ Many of the details of this Psalm are reflected in Christ's cross experience
- > Some commentators referring it all to David
- ➤ While others take a middle way, and apply it primarily to David, and in a secondary to Christ
- > However, the Church Fathers see it as a Messianic psalm

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- ➤ Nothing in David's recorded life confirm all the circumstances which are mentioned in the psalm
- ➤ He did not directly mention his enemies, nor seeking a curse upon them, as it was common in most of his psalms' lamentations
- There is nothing to hint to a certain sin, trying to proclaim his innocence, defending himself against vain accusations, nor wishing wrath against his enemies
- ➤ The fact that Jesus uttered from His cross the words of bitter woe that begin this Psalm, which was not a coincidence, have given and must ever give it a special interest and importance



- ➤ It was natural that Christian claim it, not only as a record of suffering typical of our Lord's suffering, but as actually in every detail prophetic of Him
- > This Psalm presents the reader with a great contrast
- Lament characterizes the first 21 verses, while praise and thanksgiving describe the last 10 verses
- > Therefore, it naturally falls into two parts
- Lamentation, or the suffering Christ 1-21 where David describes the awful feeling of being forsaken by God, which point clearly to Calvary; mocking, ridicule, pain, opposition, all done to an innocent man

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Introduction

- > 22-31, the second part of the psalm is a praise to God for His faithfulness
- > It can also represent the Glorified Christ

Psalm Outline

- > The Suffering Christ 22:1-21
- > The Glorified Christ 22:22-31



- At the very beginning of this verse we see the very words that the Lord Jesus spoke from the cross; *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*
- The painful cry of Golgotha: *Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani,* Matthew 27:46
- > These words of the psalm came to proclaim the price paid for our redemption
- > Jesus is forsaken because of our sins
- ➤ It is a cry of despair, quoted from this psalm by our Lord on the cross, showing that He is experiencing what came in this psalm



- ➤ Our Lord, as a representative of humanity, was counted as forsaken by the Father for some time, *He became a curse for us,* (Galatians 3:13); *For He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us,* (2 Corinthians 5:21); so that we would not be eternally forsaken by the Father
- According to Isaiah, For a mere moment, I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:7)



- ➤ "Christ was not forsaken by the Father, nor from His deity, as some may think; Or He, fearful of passion, separated with His deity from His Manhood ...; But as I already said, He was representing us in Himself, we, who were forsaken and despised; but now, the suffering of Him, of whom suffering is not befitting (according to His deity), resurrected and saved us." St. Gregory the Nazianzen
- For these are not the words of righteousness, but of my sins. For it is the old man nailed to the Cross that speaks, ignorant even of the reason why God has forsaken Him." St. Augustine



- ➤ "What does our Lord mean by saying that the Father has forsaken Him, when He Himself is God? Why did He use those words, unless we are in Him, as the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23). By saying: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He is drawing our attention, saying to us: "This psalm is written about Me'." St. Augustine
- Why, Because, He has chosen to stand in the place of guilty sinners
- ➤ He, who have never known sin, have made the infinite sacrifice to become sin and receive God's just wrath upon sin and sinners
- ➤ He did this because of His great love, and because of God's great love



- > why have You forsaken Me?, It is not to be understood as if the personal union of the divine and human natures were parted, or that the one was now separated from the other
- For the fulness of the Godhead still dwelt bodily in Him
- > And nor that He ceased to be the object of the Father's love
- Nor that He lost joy and comfort
- ➤ He was now deprived of the gracious presence of God, of the manifestations of His love to His human soul, and had a sense of divine wrath, not for His own sins, but for the sins of His people



- ➤ He was for a while destitute of help and comfort which was necessary for the work of our redemption
- ➤ He had the sins of His people charged to Him, He must bear the whole punishment
- ➤ He knew that as He was wounded and bruised for the sins of His people
- This is done to set forth the greatness and bitterness of His sufferings; that not only men hid their faces from Him, but, what was most grievous of all, His God departed from Him



- From hence it appears that He was truly man, had a human soul, and endured sorrows and sufferings
- The repetition of the words, *My God*, *My God*, denotes the depth of His distress, which made Him cry so earnestly
- > And from the words of My groaning?, From regarding, pitying, or answering My fervent prayers and strong cries
- This seems to refer to Christ's prayer in the garden
- ➤ Jesus not only endured the *withdrawal* of the Father's fellowship, but also the actual outpouring of the Father's *wrath* upon Him as a substitute for sinful humanity



- > What Jesus endured on the cross was so complex, so dark, and so mysterious that it was beyond emotional comprehension
- > On the cross Jesus felt abandoned by the Father, and felt that His groaning and cries went unanswered
- > *I cry in the daytime*, In the time of His suffering on the cross, which was in the daytime
- And in the night season, In the night in which He was in the garden praying
- > The night in which He was betrayed and was seized
- > am not silent, Jesus prayed, not once but three times for the cup to pass



- > But, He may seem to be forsaken, He still believes Jehovah is the God of the covenant—still the Holy One in whom His people could trust
- > His present agony did not change God's holiness
- ➤ The Sufferer sees God righteous and blameless and He had still unwavering confidence in God
- ➤ Though His prayer seemed not to be heard, and though He was not delivered, He did not blame God
- ➤ He believed that God was righteous, though He received no answer; He did not doubt that there was some sufficient reason why He was not answered



- > God is seen *enthroned* in His sanctuary, where the praises and prayers of Israel are ever being offered up to Him
- ➤ If He hears them, He will assuredly, in His own good time, hear the Sufferer
- > Our fathers trusted in You, It sustains the Sufferer to think how many before Him have cried to God, and trusted in Him, and for a while they have seemed not to be heard, however, eventually they were heard and saved
- ➤ He takes comfort from the experiences which the people in former ages had of the benefit of faith and prayer



- They cried to You, and were delivered, As the Israelites did in Egyptian bondage, and as they in later times did when in distress (Exodus 2:23)
- And it may also mean that He is telling God that He is now left without help in His overwhelming griefs, while all others have been helped
- > We may remind the Lord of His former loving-kindnesses to His people and beseech Him to be still the same
- > This is true wrestling with Him



- The *worm* is a symbol of extreme weakness and helplessness; it is naturally despised, put down, trodden upon
- ➤ How deeply Christ was "despised of the people" appeared most evidently when they expressed their desire that, instead of Him, a murderer should be granted to them (Acts 3:14)
- As we read in Isaiah 53:3 "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." and (Isaiah 49:7); and for the fulfilment, (Matthew 27:39)
- Christ calls Himself a worm not because of human nature but on account of the opinion that men of the world had of Him



- The reproaches of God and of His people all fell on Him and it was considered a reproach to men to be seen in His company, or to be thought to belong to Him, and be His disciple
- Therefore; some, who believed He was the Messiah, yet would not confess Him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, (John 12:43)
- ➤ He was ridiculed as a foolish man, and one that not only deceived others, but Himself too
- > Those that saw Him hanging on the cross mocked Him
- ➤ Instead of being compassionate and show concern, they added to His afflictions, with all the gestures and expressions of bad manners rebuking Him with His fall



- ➤ They used it as an excuse to call His relationship with God into question
- ➤ David was sometimes mocked for his confidence in God; but in the sufferings of Christ this was literally and exactly fulfilled
- Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him, This statement reveals the frequent ignorance and cruelty of those who oppose God and His people
- > It claimed to see no deliverance, when it would indeed come soon
- ➤ It also questioned the delight of God in the Forsaken One, when God did and does truly delight in that One



- ➤ David understood both for himself and, prophetically speaking, for the Messiah that in the depth of agony and the sense of abandonment, one could still appeal to God in remembrance of better times
- > God was not only the *God of their fathers*, as before (verse 4), but the God of their infancy
- ➤ God begins his care over us from the earliest hour of our existence
- ➤ However, this seems to refer to the miraculous conception of Christ, who was the Son of God, in a sense in which no other man ever was, being formed, as to his human nature, by the power of God, in the womb of a pure virgin



- > St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, "the psalmist refers to that the Lord was born without human seed from the womb and body of the Virgin Mary; a way of birth different from that by which men are regularly born through matrimony."
- ➤ You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts, This was eminently true of Christ, whom God so miraculously preserved and provided for in His infancy, giving, in a supernatural way, an order to Joseph and Mary to carry Him into Egypt, as we read Matthew 2:20-21
- > Be not far from Me, The plea for help is again eloquently and persuasively stated



- God seems far away; but trouble is near and there is none to help, so You must help me, God!
- > David himself had never been in such tests or sufferings
- ➤ He had always had friends and followers, (1 Samuel 22:1-2 25:13; 2 Samuel 15:18,24,18:4)
- ➤ But He whom David prefigured, his Antitype, was abandoned and deserted, He was alone "*All the disciples forsook him and fled*" (Matthew 26:56)
- > He was truly one that "had no helper" Psalm 22:11



- ➤ The Sufferer represents the adversaries who crowd around Him under the figure of "bulls" fierce animals
- > They are wicked, violent, fierce and furious enemies
- > Strong bulls of Bashan, Bashan, the richest pasture-ground of Palestine, produces the largest and strongest animals (Ezekiel 39:18)
- ➤ Hence "the king of Bashan" became an expression for powerful oppressors (Amos 4:1)
- ➤ These are the chief priests, elders, Scribes, and Pharisees, among the Jews, and Herod and Pontius Pilate among the Gentiles, comparable to bulls for their fierceness and rage against Christ



- ➤ Who, after having determined His death, Psalm 2:2, were so unashamed as to make their appearance at His cross, and to insult Him with their mockeries
- > They gape at Me, One metaphor is followed by another
- Fierce and threatening as bulls, the adversaries are hungry as lions
- They opened their blasphemous mouths as if they were about to swallow Him
- > They are like roaring lions they longed to tear the Savior in pieces and eager to devour Him, as wild beasts raven over their prey



- > Turning from His enemies, our Lord describes His own personal condition
- ➤ All His strength was gone and His whole being was made a sacrifice
- ➤ *I am poured out like water*, Weak as water, and giving up to the power of death, emptying Himself of all the supports of His human nature
- > Or, when the side of our Lord was stabbed, blood and water came out of the wound



- > My bones are out of joint, The strain of the body hanging on the cross would dislocate the joints of the arms, and would be felt in every bone of the body
- ➤ My heart is like wax, Melted through fear and overwhelming grief
- > My strength is dried up, He has, in a manner, no more moisture left in Him, than is in a dry potsherd
- ➤ All His strength was dried up in the tremendous flames of avenging justice, even as the paschal lamb was roasted in the fire



- > My tongue clings to My jaws, An extreme and agonizing thirst sets in and the saliva especially is suppressed, so that the mouth feels thirsty and dry
- This was fulfilled in His thirst upon the cross, (John 19:28)
- You have brought Me to the dust of death, The death He chose, was according to the will of the Father, as a work of obedience on His part
- The sentence of death passed upon Adam was: *And to dust you shall return,* Genesis 3:19
- And therefore Christ, having an eye to that sentence in His obedience to death, here uses a similar expression



- For dogs have surrounded Me, A new description of His enemies
- They are wicked like an unclean, cowardly, tormenting mob, like the troops of hungry and vicious brutal dogs
- The idea seems to be taken from a number of dogs encompassing a distressed deer, which they have hunted down, as is suggested in the remarks on the title of this psalm
- They pierced My hands and My feet, These words cannot, with any probability, be applied to David, nor to the attempts of his enemies upon him; for their design was, not to torment his hands or feet, but to take away his life



- ➤ But this is literally verified in Christ, whose hands and feet were really pierced, and nailed to the cross, according to the manner of the Roman crucifixions
- ➤ *I can count all My bone,* The Son of David, despite His great suffering on the cross, suffered no broken bones
- > St. John carefully noted this (John 19:31-37)
- ➤ This fact fulfilled this prophecy, as well as Psalm 34:20 and the pattern of the Passover lamb as described in Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12



- ➤ The flesh and skin of Christ body were expanded because of the posture of the body on the cross and that may have made the bones visible and easy to be numbered
- They look and stare at Me, Jesus found no place to hide from the unwanted stares of cruel, mocking men at the cross
- The sight of the agonizing body ought to have ensured sympathy from the multitude, but it only increased their harsh mocking
- According to the scholar Origen, those "bones" symbolically refer to the disciples of the Lord Christ and the congregation of believers, who were scattered in weakness at the moments of the crucifixion



- > But, with the resurrection, they gathered together again as one body, of which not a single bone was broken
- ➤ According to many fathers, the true believers the bones of the Lord Christ even if they become weak in the moments of tribulation and martyrdom, yet the grace of God would support them, and no one of them would be broken
- > They divide My garments among them, The garments of the executed were the rights of the executioners in most cases, but it was not often that they cast lots to divide them



- ➤ This very circumstance was exactly fulfilled, John 19:23-24 which shows how clearly David saw the day of Christ, and how surely Jesus is He of whom the prophets spoke
- There were four soldiers involved in the crucifixion of Christ, and they divided His garments into four parts, and everyone took his part
- And for My clothing they cast lots, Which was a seamless coat, woven from the top to the bottom; and therefore, not willing to rend it, they cast lots upon it who should have it



- > The Sufferer request is not focused on the change of His situation, but on the presence of God
- He actually, looks away from His many tormentors and fixes His eye upon God
- hasten to help Me, Come to support Me
- > Come to deliver Me from these dreadful sorrows
- ➤ This is not necessarily a prayer to be rescued from death, but to be delivered from those deep mental sorrows that had come upon Him



- > His help was alone in God, His strength
- ➤ There were none that could help Him but God, and He seemed to stand afar off from helping Him, Psalm 22:1; and His situation being so distressed, as is represented in the preceding verses, it required hurry
- > St Augustine says that by the word *sword* He meant from the tongue of dissension
- ➤ Other commentators say that it symbolizes the authority of the Roman governor that authority by which Christ was actually put to death



The Suffering Christ 22:1-21

- > the sword May symbolize an instrument of death
- > Or, could also mean the wrath of God
- ➤ If He prayed, even on the cross, to be delivered from it, the prayer must have been offered with the reservations previously made in Gethsemane, "*If it be possible*" (Matthew 26:39); "*If it is Your will*" (Luke 22:42); "*Nevertheless not as I will, but as You will*" (Matthew 26:39)
- The dog may mean Satan
- > Or the whole company of Christ's enemies, who though many in number were as united as if there were one dog, and with one consent sought to kill Him



The Suffering Christ 22:1-21

- ➤ Having experienced deliverance in the past from many and great enemies, who were strong as the *wild oxen*, the Redeemer utters His last cry for rescue from death, which is fierce and mighty as the lion
- > Save Me from the lion's mouth, His enemies represented as fierce and hungry vicious lions
- > Or, perhaps the devil who is as a roaring lion
- > St. Augustine comments and says, "save Me from the mouth of the kingdom of this world, and from the loftiness of the proud, exalting themselves to special pre-eminence, and enduring no partakers, save My humility."



The Suffering Christ 22:1-21

- > This prayer was heard, and the darkness of the cross left
- After pouring out His soul in agony, now He has a glorious sense that God has *answered* Him
- ➤ The answer of God to Christ instantly meant that He no longer felt forsaken
- ➤ The deliverance from the crisis itself may be yet to come, but it is the feeling of deliverance from being forsaken by God in the midst of the crisis
- There is immense relief, joy, and peace in the words, *You have* answered *Me*



- ➤ The delights of Jesus are always with His church and He is not ashamed to call them brethren
- Among His first resurrection words were these, "Go to my brethren."
- ➤ In Hebrews 2:11, St. Paul puts these words directly into the mouth of Christ, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren."
- Actually, Hebrews 2:12 quotes the second half of Psalm 22 (specifically, verse 22), proving clearly that the entire psalm points to Jesus, not just the agony of the first half



- ➤ In the midst of the assembly I will praise You, Jesus reveals His purpose in declaring the divine name, it is that God may be praised
- > "I will declare Thy name to the humble, and to My brethren that love one another as they have been beloved by Me. With Joy, I shall declare Your glory in the midst of My church." St. Augustine
- ➤ The church is a congregation of love, her members are the brethren of the Lord Christ
- At the same time, it is a congregation of those who fear the Lord (Psalm 22:23)



- ➤ The praise of God is to be joined with the fear of God, according to the teaching of Scripture
- > The Savior is addressing the congregation of the saints
- > He urges the faithful to unite with Him in thanksgiving
- The description of *fearing the Lord* is very frequent and very edifying; it is the beginning of wisdom
- ➤ All you descendants of Jacob, He first addresses Himself to the Jewish people, to whom the gospel was first to be preached
- And it may also mean all spiritual seed of Jacob all those who are true worshippers of God



- > St. Augustine comments on *all you offspring of Israel, and says,* 'Let all who have been born to a new life and restored to the vision of God *fear Him.*"
- God has used and would use that *affliction* to great purpose
- The Sufferer is saying that the Lord had heard His prayer, and this was a reason why others should also trust in the Lord, and feel assured that He would likewise hear their prayers
- The Father might seem to disregard His Son's affliction; but it was not really so, For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him



And there was a great reward as we read in Philippians 2:8-11, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."



- The response to such a wonderful deliverance was *public praise*, and *keeping promises*
- ➤ My praise shall be of You, He owed His deliverance entirely to God
- ➤ He will show the tokens of His gratitude in a public manner, in order thereby to edify others
- ➤ I will fulfill My promises before those who fear God and are His loyal followers
- > St. Augustine interpretation of this verse is "I will offer the sacraments of My Body and Blood in the sight of them that fear Him."



- > The poor shall eat and be satisfied, The spiritually poor find a feast in Jesus, they feed upon Him to the satisfaction of their hearts
- Especially in the Eucharistic where Christ offers His Body and Blood
- The result shall be life for evermore; for the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, worthily received, preserve men's bodies and souls to everlasting life



- ➤ The faithfulness of God to the Forsaken One even becomes the base for bringing *all the ends of the world* to the *LORD*
- Not only it is true that the LORD has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted (Psalm 22:24), but He uses that affliction to reach all the ends of the world for the knowledge of God, for repentance unto Him, and for His worship (all the families of the nations shall worship before You)
- > Shall remember and turn to the LORD, Shall be ashamed of their idols, mindful of the true God, repentant of their sins, and firmly are sincere to be reconciled with God



- ➤ So, this is an evident prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles to the knowledge of God and Christ by the gospel, and a clear proof that this Psalm immediately speaks of Christ; to whom alone these passages belong
- ➤ Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame
- ➤ Psalm 22 powerfully displays that joy, both in His obedience to and glorifying of His God and Father, and the joy of saving and loving those who would trust in Him; that there would be *brethren* that He declared the name of God
- > Because God is not only the God and Lord of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles, and of all nations



- In verse 26 the Psalmist said that the meek, the lowly, and poor should eat and be satisfied
- > And here he says it is for everyone
- ➤ *All the prosperous of the earth*; the rich and great, the nobles, princes, and kings, should be called in to partake of the feast too
- > and worship, It shows what kind of eating the Psalmist spoke of, that it is a spiritual eating, a feeding upon the bread of life, a partaking of Christ, the Eucharist
- ➤ All human race, for none can escape death, shall bow before Christ, either willingly as His worshippers, or unwillingly as His conquered enemies



- As we read in Philippians 2:10-11, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
- Some interpret *All those who go down to the dust,* as a group of those who are crushed, broken, and oppressed
- > Salvation is for them, as well as for the rich and the great, and the poor, the sad, the sorrowful
- Even he who cannot keep himself alive, That is, the greatest, as well as the meanest, must acknowledge that their salvation proceeds from Him alone because no one can scape death



- > The faithfulness of God unto the formerly Forsaken One is told throughout the generations, bringing great glory to the LORD
- The Church is founded on a rock, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it, (Matthew 16:18)
- The kingdom of truth on earth shall never fail
- As one generation is passing away, another will arise in its stead
- Christ shall always have a, posterity, children and heirs to serve Him in every age
- They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, His righteousness shall be announced to the younger generation



- ➤ One generation after another shall come, and shall narrate God's righteousness, as shown forth in Christ, each to its successor a people yet to be born telling them that God *has done this*
- > Just before He died, Jesus cried out, 'It is finished' (John 19:30)
- ➤ This is a quotation from the last verse of Psalm 22:31, *That He has done this*
- The psalm began with the cry of My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? ends with the word "It is finished,"
- > Salvation's glorious work is done, there is peace on earth, and glory in the highest

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Discussion

- ➤ What can you conclude about Jesus fulfilling prophecy by reading Psalm22? Who wrote it and when was it written?
- ➤ How would the meaning of Psalm 22:1 be changed if it read, "Oh God, oh God . . ." instead of My God, my God . . .?"
- ➤ Did Jesus ever fear being forsaken by God?
- Despite feeling forsaken, what is the Sufferer's response to God? (Psalm 22:3) What does this response reveal about the act of worship?

Discussion



- ➤ Why is the Sufferer confident that God will eventually rescue and deliver him? Psalm 22:4-5
- > Even though people around Him have turned against Him, in what does the Sufferer take comfort? Psalm 22:9-10
- ➤ How does He describe what He is physically feeling because of His enemies in Psalm 22:14-15,17?
- ➤ What does the Psalmist promise to do in response to God's deliverance?



Discussion

- ➤ How should the fact that Jesus will return to earth in glory affect the way a believer lives today?
- What is the 22nd Psalm all about?