



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 31

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is: *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David*
- And according to the Septuagint it is *To the end, a psalm of David himself, an ecstasy*
- Some think Jeremiah is the author claiming that verse 13 begins exactly with the same words as Jeremiah 20:10
- There are several other apparent references to passages in the book of Jeremiah
- However, the author, according to the title, is David
- There is no mention of time or place, to help us to ascertain when, where, or on what occasion this Psalm was written



Introduction

- But some say David wrote it during his persecution by Saul perhaps in the wilderness of Maon pointing to the coincidence between *in my haste* (Psalm 31:22), and *David made haste to flee* (1 Samuel 23:26)
- Or, during his son Absalom's rebellion against him
- The general nature of the sufferings of the psalmist makes this psalm the voice of many believers throughout the generations
- It represents the continuous struggle suffered by the believer, or by the whole church in this world; and the salvation and the conquest that would certainly follow this struggle



Introduction

- Many scholars say that it is a prophecy about Christ
- St. Jerome says, "The Psalm, at the opening, contains the voice of the Mediator Himself; then of the people redeemed by His Blood, in the person of the Prophet. The Redeemer therefore saith to the FATHER, In Thee, O Lord"
- St. Augustine comments, "*To the end, a psalm of David himself, an ecstasy*, To the end a Psalm of David Himself, the Mediator strong of hand in persecutions. For the word ecstasy, which is added to the title, signifies a transport of the mind, which is produced either by a panic, or by some revelation."



Introduction

- He continue and says, “But in this Psalm the panic of the people of God troubled by the persecution of all the heathen, and by the failing of faith throughout the world, is principally seen. But first the Mediator Himself speaks: then the People redeemed by His Blood gives thanks: at last in trouble it speaks at length, which is what belongs to the ecstasy; but the Person of the Prophet himself is twice interposed, near the end, and at the end.”
- The Psalm is recommended by St. Athanasius to Marcellinus as most appropriate to the Christian who, for the Name of his Master, is enduring the attacks of enemies



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8
- Trouble and Trust 31:9-18
- Personal and Public Praise 31:19-22
- A Call for All God's People to Praise Him 31:23-24

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- If prayer to God for aid in a special time of trouble is the main object of the psalm, the expression of full trust in God is a secondary object, and is maintained throughout the psalm
- This is the reason why the Psalmist thus appeals to God
- It was his firm confidence in Him; in His character; in His promises; in His ability to deliver him in the time of danger
- *I put my trust*, It is a continued act; for the Psalmist does not say, "I have trusted", or "I will trust", but *I trust*; and this was a very considerable thing to do in this time of his distress
- The Lord is always to be trusted in

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- We do not know the precise nature or time of the trouble, other than it severely afflicted David and made him despair of life
- Nevertheless, David proclaimed his trust in the Lord
- Despite the extremity of his danger, his belief is firm in the coming defeat of his enemies, and in his own deliverance and restoration
- He was not ashamed to call upon the Lord
- He considered it appropriate that God answered by *never* allowing His servant to *never be ashamed* before his enemies and adversaries

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- He is asking *Let me never be ashamed* neither in this world, nor in that to come
- The believer has no reason to be ashamed of anything in this life but sin, and the imperfection of his own righteousness
- *Deliver me in Your righteousness*, Being “Just”, He would never forsake those who have put all their trust and confidence in Him
- David knew there was no acceptance with God, no justification before Him, nor any deliverance and salvation from sin and death; but by the righteousness of God
- St. Isaac the Syrian says, “He who dedicates himself to God, once and forever, would pass through life with a comfortable mind.”

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- *Bow down Your ear to me*, Or, incline Your ear to me
- Some scholars applied this verse to Christ who had humbled Himself and bent down, by taking upon Himself our form, and became subject to the Cross for our sakes
- *Deliver me speedily*, Which shows that he was in great danger, and his situation required speed
- David did not doubt God's deliverance, his request is for a speedy deliverance
- David is asking God to be for him a shelter and security from his enemies

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- The prayer to God that He may be that which we know He is
- David is asking God to Be what He is, *rock of refuge*, and manifest Himself in act to be what He is *A fortress of defense to save me*
- That He may be in reality and in our feeling that which we know Him to be by faith
- According to St. Isaac the Syrian, the believer does not wait for the time of temptation to seek refuge in God, but seeks God first to be his refuge when temptation dwells

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- David prays for God to be his Rock and Fortress in the future, because he has always looked to Him as his Rock and Fortress in the past
- *For You are my rock*, St. Gregory says, “Notice, that the place is of little avail, unless the Spirit of God be present. Satan sinned in heaven; Adam sinned in Paradise; Lot, who had been a saint in Sodom, sinned in the mountain.”
- David did not ask for rescue because he deserved it, but *for Your name's sake*
- David is saying that his entire faith is in the Lord

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- David believed that if God would *lead* and *guide* him, it would bring honor to God and His name
- Since David does sincerely trust God, so he says, O my God, Be my director, *Lead me and guide me*
- The psalmist desires the Lord would lead him in the way of truth and paths of righteousness, according to His word
- And guide him with His counsel, and by His Spirit, that he might walk in the way in which he should go
- David knew his enemies wanted to trap and destroy him, but he also knew that God could rescue him even from clever and determined enemies

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- Some scholars say that many were the nets which Satan laid for our Lord like the net of the temptation in the wilderness
- Satan acts not by himself, but employs his instruments, whether the natural impulses of the human body, as hunger and thirst, or the temptations of the wicked
- *Pull me out of the net*, May also be the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life
- The enemies of David were shrewd and crafty as well as mighty; if they could not conquer him by power, they would capture him by deceit
- Our own spiritual enemy are of the same order--they are of the serpent's offspring and seek to catch us by their deceit

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- The Savior used this expression on the cross and then gave His last breath, (Luke 23:46)
- Perhaps David was not thinking of submitting his soul into the hands of the Creator when he wrote this Psalm
- He may only intend to commit himself, both soul and body, into the Divine protection
- He wanted to be preserved from the attacks of his enemies
- Most likely death was not in his thought, it was in life, during its troubles and dangers, that he trusted his spirit to God

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- However, if David here looks upon himself as a dying man, by these words he puts his departing soul to God who gave it, and to whom, at death, the spirit returns
- David understood that his surrender to God was appropriate because it was God who had *redeemed* him
- He belonged to God both in *gratitude* for rescue, and in recognition that God had *purchased* him
- St. Athanasius says that the souls of all good men were by these same words entrusted into the same loving care, Christ desiring that His people should have no less secure place of refuge at the hour of their death, than He had at His

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- *You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth*, Which may be understood, either of the temporal redemption of his life from destruction in times past, which encouraged him to commit his life into the hands of God now
- Or, of spiritual and eternal redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and which the psalmist speaks of as if it was past, though it was to come
- *O Lord God of truth*, This is a second reason why it was good and appropriate for David to surrender his life to God – because God is the *God of truth*

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- It follows well, because *Into Your hand* therefore I hate all other hands of *useless idols*
- David's surrender to God meant that he also had to *resist* the recognition or worship of idols – which are *useless idols*, having no power to speak or save
- *I have hated*, He does not hate the people, but their ways
- In contrast David could say, *But I trust in the Lord*
- While they trust in vanities vain things and in lying vanities; I trust in the Lord, who is God all-sufficient, and is my Shepherd, and therefore I shall lack no good thing

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- Having relied on God's mercy, David will be glad and rejoice in it
- Happiness and joy were the outcome of David's surrender and submission to God
- Much of this was because his heart overflowed with gratitude, thinking of all God had done for him
- David was happy because he knew God did not ignore him in his time of *trouble*
- When God looks upon one's trouble and considers it, He looks with an eye of pity and compassion on the sufferer, and will grant him some relief

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- He sympathizes with them considering the nature of their trouble, their weakness to bear it, and the best way and time to deliver them out of it
- Some scholars refer this verse to our Lord Jesus Christ saying “How did He consider it but by taking it upon Himself?”
- We read in Exodus 3:7-8, “I have surely seen the oppression of My people ... for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them.”
- He not only looked on the affliction of His true Israel, but He Himself took it upon Himself

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- David was happy because he knew God had deep, substantial knowledge of David – even to the *soul* – in his seasons of *adversities*
- God has not stood distant from him, but has shown David love and care
- This gladness is in the midst of trouble
- This should be the way Christians act when problems come
- Our gladness in the Lord should not depend on circumstances
- God did not promise that we would not have tribulation in this world

A Petition for Salvation, and Trust in God's Answer 31:1-8



- He did promise to be with us and help us in the face of the problem
- David was happy because he knew that God answered (or would answer) his prayer to be delivered from the snares of his enemies
- *have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy*, The original reference was no doubt to the city of Keilah in the wilderness of Ziph, and Maon, where David was nearly captured by Saul and his army, 1 Samuel 23:7
- *You have set my feet in a wide place*, David was happy because God did not only preserve him from enemies, but He also *set* David in a place of safety and security



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- The tone of the Psalm changes
- This part of the Psalm reminds us of Psalm 6, and of Jeremiah's complaints
- The previous section of this psalm ended with calm trust and gratitude to God
- Here David once again took up the lament, showing that both rest and adversity come to God's people in seasons
- Yet in his trouble, David looks again to the Lord
- He follows up his prayer for mercy by an explanation of his need of mercy



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- This trouble spoken of here, has weakened his body and his spirit
- He is in trouble, in afflictive trouble hard pressed and distressed
- With continual weeping his eye is almost consumed or *wastes away*
- He has cried so much that his eyes have run out of tears
- David described his pitiful condition in terms that seem to be taken from the Book of Job
- *my soul and my body*, He means here the whole body
- His sorrows are inward and penetrating and his mind is oppressed



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- David, from his youth, was known as a brave man who did not fear death
- Yet, in moments of weakness, he felt that his whole life was *spent with grief*
- In the times of tribulations, men mostly forget their days of peace and joy, and counts their days as an unceasing series of pain
- But the prophet David turned such bitter feelings into psalms, in which lamentations mix with songs of praise, supplications with thanksgiving, and weeping with exultations
- He means that his life is a life of suffering and distress, and by grief his days are shortened



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- David's troubles made him a man of sorrows
- Herein he was a type of Christ, who was acquainted with grief
- David acknowledged that his afflictions were merited by his own sins, but Christ suffered for ours
- *My strength fails because of my iniquity*, The source of all his grief and trouble is his sin
- He regarded all this trouble, whether directly from the hand of God, or from man - as the fruit of sin
- Whether he refers to any particular sin as the cause of this trouble, or to the sin of his nature as the source of all evil, it is not clear



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- In his affliction, he was seen by his enemies, as an evil man, on whom the anger of God dwelt
- His misery became for them a cause for scorn and mockery
- Has not that what happened to the Lord Christ Himself, who was unjustly delivered to trial; mocked, ridiculed, and spat in His face?
- About whom the prophet said, *“He is despised and rejected by men; A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”* (Isaiah 53:3)
- What is more painful, was that David’s friends feared to be connected to him; lest they would be counted as taking his side against king Saul



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- He felt their reproaches more keenly intensely and strongly
- Those who are nearest and closest can injure and wound the hardest and severest because they were supposed to know him, and knew he did not deserve to be treated this way
- And even those who met him in public avoided him, afraid of suffering persecution themselves by any sign of sympathy
- *I am forgotten like a dead man*, All David's youthful heroism and bravery were now gone from remembrance
- He had been the savior of his country, but his services were buried in forgetfulness



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- St. Augustine comments, “And they have forgotten me, as if I were dead from their hearts.”
- *I am like a broken vessel*, a useless and worthless thing, cast aside and forgotten
- Of no value to anyone; only fit to be thrown away
- Sad condition for a king



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- The reproach and the false accusations spread against him had reached David's ears, and these had so affected him
- He had already referred to two sources of trouble
- That he was *reproached* by his friends and neighbors
- And that he was *forgotten* by those who ought to have remembered him, and that they treated him as though he were dead
- The third is referred to here that he was the subject of *slander*, or of false narratives



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- These words are also in Jeremiah 20:10
- Fear was *on every side*, In his own heart, and in the hearts of all his friends, when it came to the point of his enemies holding a formal council
- He knew that whatever counsel his enemies took against him, the design was not to take away his liberty, but to take away his life
- Thus, in all the plots of the Pharisees and Scribes against Christ
- The plan was to take away His life
- But David now returns to expressions of trust in God, and to earnest prayer to Him



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- His faith revived again under all the discouraging views he had of things
- He committed himself to God, believing He was able to help him in his time of trouble, and deliver him
- However great David's troubles were, his *trust* in God was even greater



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- *My times*, The time of his life and how long he will live, or everything and all events of his life (and the timing of them) either happy or sad are in God's hand
- In faith he had committed all things into God's hand
- Not one of them but is shaped by God and ordered by Him and not in the hand of his enemies
- Knowing that our times are in God's hand makes us completely comforted
- As we read in Romans 8:31, "*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*"



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- If God have our times in his hand, what can discourage us?
- David was praying that since all these things are under God's control; He will rescue him from his enemies
- David borrowed from the priestly blessing described in Numbers 6:23-27, asking for the goodness and the favor of God to be poured upon him
- David is asking God to express His love and favor to him, by answering his prayers
- *Save me for Your mercies'sake*, Not for any merit and righteousness of his own, but for the sake of the grace and goodness of the Lord



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- According to St. Ambrose, that *Your servant* is the Word of God who incarnated and became a servant for our sake; who carried our sufferings without separation from His Father, being His Word
- He says, “Who took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men.”
- According to some, the cry out of the psalmist here, *Make Your face shine upon Your servant*, is a cry out seeking the coming of the Messiah who saves man from evil



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- David is asking God not to let him be disappointed
- In the time of trial David had put his confidence in God and in His promises
- May the persecuted and the afflicted always find God to be a safe and secure refuge
- David asked God to do to his enemies that which his enemies wished to do unto him
- There is no reason to take the prayer, *Let the wicked be ashamed*, as a petition for their destruction
- They will be *ashamed* sooner or later, of their wickedness and of their false trust and confidence



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- They rely on their strength; their skill; their courage; their resources; and not on God
- Let it now be seen that these things constitute no safe ground of trust and let not others be encouraged to follow their example
- *Let them be silent in the grave*, David prophesies the silencing of those that reproach and speak evil of the people of God
- There is a day coming, when the Lord will execute judgment upon them
- The ungodly sinners can expect only shame and the silence of death as their portion in eternity



Trouble and Trust 31:9-18

- David is asking God to put an end to his enemies', persecutors', and slanderers' pride and malice, and defeat their plan
- Or may God silence them by leading them to repentance
- *contemptuously against the righteous*, St. Augustine thinks verse 18 is about Christ
- He says, "Which speak iniquity against Christ, in their pride and contempt of Him as a crucified man."

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- We see here another transition
- David turns from prayer to praise, and in the next four verses he praises the goodness and mercy and marvelous loving-kindness of God
- *You have laid up*, His favor is not always visible to them, but it is *laid up* for them in His treasure, from where it shall be drawn forth when they need it, and He sees it fit
- It may also mean *that this goodness* is sweetly shown, and only declared in the hidden chambers of the heart, to them that fear God

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- God's goodness to those who fear and trust Him is like an infinite treasure stored up, and at the proper time brought out and used for them that take refuge in Him
- *In the presence of the sons of men*, God had not only laid it up in secret, but he had worked out this deliverance before people, or had shown His goodness to them openly and in the view of the world
- Some say that this *goodness* is hidden in the Blessed Eucharist; concealed from those whose soul despised it; who ask with the Jews, How can this Man give us His Flesh to eat?

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- Attacked by so many enemies and so many troubles, David found security in *the secret place of God's presence*
- There was comfort and strength in the hidden place of God's *presence*, of true fellowship with Him
- It is called secret, partly because the greatest part of the world are strangers to God and His presence and partly because it is a safe and secure place, such as secret and unknown places are
- Those that fear the Lord and trust in Him are called His "hidden ones", Psalm 83:3; and God preserves them in times of trouble and danger

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- The presence of God was so secure for David that he found refuge from not only the *plots* of his enemies, but even from the attacks of their words *the strife of tongues*
- St. Augustine says, “Thou command protect them in Thy tabernacle from contradiction of tongues. But here meanwhile whilst evil tongues murmur against them, saying, who hath come thence? Thou wilt protect them in the tabernacle, that of faith in those things, which the Lord wrought and endured for us in time.”

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- David offered thanksgiving for the evidence that God had heard him in his troubles, and had answered him
- *in a strong city*, By putting him out of the reach of his enemies as it were in a protected city
- Or, as a *strong city*, proving Himself his fortress (Psalm 31:2-3)
- Most commentators understand the words literally of David's escape from Keilah where God had wonderfully preserved him
- According to others it refers to the time when he was received by the Jews at Hebron where God had commanded him to go up and be crowned there

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- Some commentators interpret *strong city to be* the Church militant, strong in her doctrine, strong in her Sacraments, strong in the various gifts of the Holy Spirit
- St. Augustine understands it of Jerusalem
- Then in verse 22 David confesses that, in the time of his affliction, and in the moments of his weakness, he felt that he was *cut off from before His eyes*
- Humbly he confesses his lack of faith in the hour of trial, when he thought himself out of God's sight

Personal and Public Praise

31:19-22



- David had despaired and given himself up for failure and defeat
- Yet when David *cried out to* God, He *heard the voice of* David's *supplication*
- Although his faith was very weak, and his unbelief strongly prevailed, yet he did not stop praying
- He knew that nothing was impossible with God, and therefore he still looked up to Him

A Call for All God's People to Praise Him 31:23-24



- He calls upon all God's saints to *love* Him, on the ground of his own experience
- He had to use what God had done in his life as the motivation and lesson to exhort all God's *saints* to *love the Lord*
- Those that have their own hearts full of love to God, cannot but desire that others also should love Him
- God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble
- This encouragement to praise God has a warning to those who refuse to do so

A Call for All God's People to Praise Him 31:23-24



- We must love God, not only for His goodness, because *the Lord preserves the faithful*, but for His justice, because He *fully repays the proud person* (who would devastate and destroy those whom He preserves), by their pride
- David closed this psalm encouraging others to find what he had found in God
- God's people have reason for *good courage*, because God does *strengthen* the trusting, hoping *heart*
- Those that hope in God have reason to be of good courage because nothing truly evil can happen to them

A Call for All God's People to Praise Him 31:23-24



- By confidence in God's promises as David had found by experience
- A similar exhortation was addressed to Joshua (Joshua in 1:7)
- It is used nearly 20 times in the Old Testament, particularly in anticipation of battle
- As St. Paul encouraged Timothy, "*Fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Timothy 6:12)



Discussion

- Why did David appeal to the Lord for help?
- How did David describe the Lord in this Psalm?
- What is it about the wicked that particularly concerns David in this Psalm?
- How does a confession of faith give one conviction and commitment to know God more, submit and rely on Him?



Discussion

- How would saving David affect the Name of the Lord?
- What commitment did David make to the Lord?
- Why is David's life filled with grief, sorrow, and sighing?
- What does David want when he asks the Lord to shine His face upon him?



Discussion

- How does David distinguish the wicked from the righteous toward the end of the psalm?
- What is the difference between pride and confidence?
- What does unequivocal trust in God, no matter what look like?
- Look back through this whole psalm. Find each instance of the word “refuge” and note how it is used.