



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 33

Bishop Youssef



# Introduction

- This Psalm has no title in the Hebrew or indication of authorship
- However, the Septuagint assigns it to David
- There is no mention of time or place, to help us to ascertain when, where, or on what occasion this Psalm was written
- It was intended as a hymn of praise to celebrate the power, wisdom, and mercy of God
- It was a liturgical Psalm
- Some scholars say that this Psalm is written as a part of the preceding one Psalm 32



# Introduction

- The reason for that is that it begins by repeating the call to praise with which Psalm 32 closed and recites the reasons on which God is worthy to be praised
- In this Psalm the psalmist appealed to the righteous to praise God because it is proper to do so in view of who He is and what He has done
- To praise the power and mighty deeds of the Creator
- We should praise Him in a manner suitable to His greatness
- God is worthy of the best in expressions of praise as well as in all we do for Him





# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- Praise the Great God 33:1-3
- Praise God for the Greatness of His Character 33:4-5
- Praise Him for His Majesty in Creation 33:6-7
- A Call for All the Earth to Fear the Lord 33:8-9
- Praise Him for His Sovereign Rule 33:10-12
- The Greatness of God Over Each Person 33:13-15
- Material Strength is an Illusion 33:16-17
- God Is the True Protector of His People 33:18-19
- A Zealous Expression of Confidence 33:20-21
- An Earnest Prayer 33:22



# Praise the Great God 33:1-3

- Psalm 32 ended by calling on the righteous to sing praises to God
- This Psalm first three verses seemed to be almost written as an elaboration of Psalm 32:11
- It begins with a call for God's *righteous* to *rejoice* and *praise*
- The psalmist primarily referred to those among God's people who walked rightly
- Because the *righteous*, *Rejoice in the Lord*
- But the unrighteous only rejoice in the world
- St. Augustine says, "rejoice, O ye righteous, not in yourselves, for that is not safe; but in the Lord ... these praise the Lord, who submit themselves unto the Lord"

# Praise the Great God 33:1-3



- We rejoice in His presence, and not in His temporal blessings
- For the rejoice in the temporal things is mortal, and the rejoice in sin is perishable; whereas the rejoice in the Lord is eternal
- *For praise from the upright is beautiful*, Is befitting, suitable, proper
- It is befitting of the believer who practices the godly life, to enjoy His privilege, and praise God
- Praising pleases Him and creates the sense of appreciation
- St. Ambrose observes that there is no greater defense against Satan than spiritual joy



# Praise the Great God 33:1-3



- The Psalmist mentions these instruments, *with the harp ... with an instrument of ten strings*, because they were used in the public worship of God in the tabernacle
- He exhorted God's people to praise Him using musical instruments
- However, there are different opinions about the use of such musical accompaniment
- Some say it belonged only to the Old Testament and not to the New
- The early Church Fathers almost all of them objected the use of musical instruments in churches

# Praise the Great God 33:1-3



- But the most important instrument is the *heart*
- St. Augustine says, “praise the Lord, presenting unto Him your bodies a living sacrifice. Let your members be servants to the love of God, and of your neighbor, in which are kept both the three and the seven commandments.”
- According to St. Didymus the blind, in the harp, the tunes come from its lower extremity, referring to the body which was created from the earth; Whereas, in the instrument with ten strings, the tunes come from its higher extremity, referring to the soul, soaring high up in the heavenlies with the spirit of thanksgiving



# Praise the Great God 33:1-3



- We often read about *the new song* in the Holy Book of Psalms (96:1,98:1,149:1); and we also hear about it in heaven (Revelation 5:9,14:3)
- Godly people are to sing *a new song* for all the mercies they have received
- And *as the mercies of God are new every morning*, (Lamentations 3:22-23) there ought to be a daily song of praise to Him
- So, *a new song* is a continual song
- *Play skillfully*, God deserves the best that we have
- *a shout*, From all our hearts; it is not that the Lord cannot hear us, but that it is natural for great joy to express itself in the loudest manner

# Praise God for the Greatness of His Character 33:4-5



- The psalmist proceeds to give reasons why God is to be praised
- The first reason, *For the word of the Lord is right*, the revealed will of God is exactly in harmony and agreement with the eternal rule of right
- It is straight, because of the faithfulness of all His promises
- As it is written, *“All His precepts are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever.”* Psalm 111:7-8
- Whatever He says is right and is true and He does His work in truth – not with deceit
- We are thankful that there is no such contradiction - that *“the law is holy ... just and good”* (Romans 7:12)

# Praise God for the Greatness of His Character 33:4-5



- Some scholars interpret the word of the Lord as Jesus Christ
- The Word of the Lord said, *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"*; (John 14:6) and it well follows, *all His work is done in truth*, since it is written, *"All things were made through Him."* (John 1:3)
- The psalmist kept thinking of the greatness of God's character, His love for *righteousness and justice* and His *goodness* spread all over the *earth*
- Righteousness is the essential principle of justice
- The psalmist rightly rejoiced that God is not or without goodness



# Praise God for the Greatness of His Character 33:4-5



- *The earth is full*, not only of God's glory (Isaiah 6:3) and of His riches (Psalm 104:24), but also of His mercy, or loving-kindness basis of thankfulness that all will acknowledge
- The Lord's love is evident in His works on earth
- The overflowing kindness of God fills the earth
- St. Augustine comments on *The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD*, and says, "throughout the whole world are sins forgiven unto men by the Mercy of the Lord."
- He says the earth rather than mankind because God's mercies are over all His works, as well as over man

# Praise Him for His Majesty in Creation 33:6-7



- God is to be praised, not only for His goodness, but also for His greatness, and especially for His greatness in creation
- His greatness goes beyond His moral goodness; He is also the God of all power and authority
- By His mere *word* the universe was created
- In this verse we have one of the most remarkable testimonies in the Old Testament to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the Father, His Word, the Son, and His Holy Spirit
- Almost all the Fathers have applied it, Tertullian, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Isidore, St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory and many others

# Praise Him for His Majesty in Creation 33:6-7



- Many have thought that St. John by saying, “*All things were made by Him*” was simply referring to this passage, and restating it in its own highest Christian meaning
- St. Augustine, referring *the heavens* to the Apostles, shows how it was the teaching of the Word of God which made them what they were, and formed them for their work
- He says, “*By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made,*” for not by themselves, but by the Word of the Lord were the righteous made strong. “*And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth*”, And all their faith by His Holy Spirit



# Praise Him for His Majesty in Creation 33:6-7



- St. Basil the Great says, “You should then perceive three things: The Father gave the order, His Word created, and His Spirit abides.”
- In verse 7 the psalmist looked at the mighty oceans and understood that they reflected God’s power and wisdom in creation
- God is showing us the exercising of His Command of His creation
- He seems to speak of what was done on the third day of the creation, Genesis 1



# Praise Him for His Majesty in Creation 33:6-7

- Or, he refers to the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, when the waters were as a wall unto them on the right hand and on the left
- But St. Augustine says, “He gathered the people of the world together, to confession of mortified sin, lest through pride they flow too freely.”
- *He lays up the deep in storehouses*, Literally, the deeps
- The waters of the great deep are regarded as stored up by the Almighty in the cavities of the ocean bed for His own use, to be used at some time or other in carrying out His purposes

# A Call for All the Earth to Fear the LORD 33:8-9



- The exhortation in verse 1 was addressed to the righteous, to praise the Lord
- The psalmist passes now to a second exhortation to fear the Lord, but it is addressed to all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, who equally enjoy the benefit of this great and glorious work of God
- People should set themselves in a state of humble *awe* before Him
- *fear and awe*, A reverence of the divine Majesty, whose divine perfections are so manifest and revealed in the works of creation
- It may also mean to be careful not to offend Him, because it must be a fearful thing to fall into His hands



# A Call for All the Earth to Fear the LORD 33:8-9



- He has promised life and prosperity only to the faithful; let the ungodly stand in awe of Him
- Fear may also allude to worship of Him, which is often expressed in Scripture by the fear of Him
- The whole duty of man is, *“Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13)
- *For He spoke*, The psalmist again considered the word of God and its effective power
- *He commanded, and it stood fast*, God's lightest word, once uttered, is a standing law, to which nature absolutely conforms, and man ought to conform

# Praise Him for His Sovereign Rule 33:10-12



- The psalmist has already praised God for His moral character and His creative power
- Now he addresses the works of providence and His power in ruling against the thoughts, wills, and actions of men
- God, mighty in His creation of heaven and earth, is mighty as well in His care for man along the history
- History is nothing but an extension of the work of creation, which shows more perfectly God's justice through remembering the promises of His abiding love

# Praise Him for His Sovereign Rule 33:10-12



- If unrighteous persist on their evil deeds, God intervenes at the right moment, either to turn their evil into blessings for His children, or to scatter and to put an end to their plans
- He brought the counsel of Ahithophel, against the prophet David to no avail (2 Samuel 17:23)
- He did the same to Haman's plots against Mordecai and his people (Esther 6,7)
- The wisdom of the wicked was always brought to nothing; whereas God's plan for salvation always prevailed and stood fast
- God overthrows the *counsel of the nations* as the counsel of Scribes and Pharisees, Annas and Caiaphas, Herod and Pontius Pilate, against our Lord



# Praise Him for His Sovereign Rule 33:10-12



- And as the counsels of great persecutors like Diocletian against His Church
- St. Gregory says, “Often, while some, puffed up by human wisdom, devise the most subtle counsels against the dispensation of God, they only carry out the Lord’s will; and while they seek to overthrow it, they indeed confirm it. So, Joseph, sold into Egypt that he might not be lord over his brethren, by that very means was made a king and prince to them.”
- *“The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, ‘Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand’”* Isaiah 14:24
- *The counsel of the Lord stands forever*, It is immutable in itself

# Praise Him for His Sovereign Rule 33:10-12



- *The plans of His heart to all generations, Which, with respect to His own people, are thoughts of peace, grace, and mercy*
- Then David turn from the nations to the chosen people
- What is true of a nation is also as true of an individual
- It is, the nation which worships God, and is under His protection
- This is said to distinguish such a nation from those which worshipped false gods or idols
- It is the nation that will consciously align itself with God and His purposes
- We are the possession of God, we belong to Him, we pertain to Him; no one can hurt us, without challenging the power of God

# The Greatness of God Over Each Person 33:13-15



- God in all His perfections and plans for the nations and ages also has His eye on humanity as individuals
- His greatness does not exclude His individual interest in *all the inhabitants of the earth*
- All those who worship Him are under His eye
- He watches over them to protect them and they enjoy His watchful care and attention
- The thought is repeated in verse 14 to show that no one can escape His eye
- He Who created man must know man's heart (Psalm 94:9)



# The Greatness of God Over Each Person 33:13-15



- As God 'formed' man originally (Genesis 2:7-8)
- The idea in the word *fashions* here is not that of creating, in the sense that He makes the heart by His own power what it is, whether good or bad; but that, as He has formed the hearts of all people, He must see what is in the heart
- The Maker of the human heart must understand what is in it
- The heart of man is what he is
- He understands all that they do
- God notices even when we give a cold cup of water to a little child
- No job regardless of how small it is, goes unnoticed of God, if it is done to His glory

# Material Strength is an Illusion

## 33:16-17



- The illusion and the deception of material resources is contrasted with God's care for His people
- The king is not saved by the greatness of his army
- As Goliath, with his great strength, could not deliver himself out of the hands of David, a young man
- The psalmist understood that human effort *alone* does not determine events
- God's work and plan in, and beyond, and sometimes instead of human effort, accomplish His purpose
- This is the lesson which God at various times and in different manners taught His people

# Material Strength is an Illusion

## 33:16-17



- As it is written that Judas Maccabeus *“considering the arrival of the multitude, and the various preparations of weapons, and the fierceness of the beasts, extending his hands to heaven called upon the Lord, who works miracles, who gives victory to those who are worthy, not according to the power of the weapons,”* (2 Maccabees 15:21)
- Horses were some of the most advanced military tools in that day
- Because there is a God in heaven who governs the affairs and destiny of men, even the use of the most effective resources cannot in themselves determine the outcome



# God Is the True Protector of His People 33:18-19



- The psalmist continues to think of God's hand in world-shaking events (as the battles of kings), and His care for the individual
- The eye of the Lord is in a certain sense upon all, He observes and is aware how all men act
- But it rests especially upon the righteous and carefully watches over the safety and prosperity of His faithful people
- Whosoever therefore would have safety must expect it only from the watchful eye and almighty hand of God
- Jesus told us that God cares for the smallest of birds (Matthew 10:29); surely, He will care for those who honor Him, who are made in His image

# God Is the True Protector of His People 33:18-19



- Those who truly *fear* the Lord find their *hope in His mercy*, not in their own goodness or righteousness
- In verse 19 he talks about the protection and deliverance, which a man's own strength cannot give, but will be provided freely by God, who alone keeps souls from death, and *delivers* those who are in danger or threat
- Famine was a catastrophe from which Palestine often suffered (Genesis 12:10,42:5; Ruth 1:1; 2 Samuel 21:1; etc.)
- The righteous were sometimes "kept alive" through a time of famine by miraculous means as in the story of Elijah and the widow (1 Kings 17:6,16)

# God Is the True Protector of His People 33:18-19



- St. Augustine comments and says, “Whereby shall we be saved? Not by might, not by strength, not by power, not by glory, not by a horse. Whereby, then? Whither shall I go? Where shall I find whence I may be saved? Seek not long, seek not far. *Behold, the eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear Him.* Ye see that these are the same whom He beholds in His habitation, those who hope in His mercy; not in their own merits, not in strength, not in fortitude, not in a horse; but in His mercy.”



# A Zealous Expression of Confidence 33:20-21



- These are the words of the church, expressing her expectation and faith, having praised Him and considered God's greatness from many angles, it was appropriate to simply *wait for the Lord* – for His guidance, His word, His deliverance – looking to Him as *our help and shield*
- We trust in no one and nothing but Him - not in armies, not in horses, not in our own strength, He alone is our dependence
- Confident in God's good will, and in His power to help us, we wait patiently and cheerfully for Him to manifest Himself in His own good time

# A Zealous Expression of Confidence 33:20-21



- *For our heart shall rejoice in Him, Here is the fruit of our confidence, our souls are always happy, because we have trusted in His holy name*
- *rejoice in Him, Not in sin, nor in ourselves and in our boastings, all such rejoicing is evil, but in the Lord, in His Word, in His person, righteousness, and salvation*
- *And this joy is an inward joy, real joy, joy in the Holy Spirit; and is unspeakable*
- *This is what the psalmist calls upon the saints to do, in the beginning of the Psalm, and so his end in composing it is answered*



# An Earnest Prayer 33:22

- The Psalm concludes with a prayer asking God to restore His people with His love
- The measure of men's hope and trust in God is the measure of His mercy and goodness to them
- Those who have a full trust in Him may confidently expect a fall and complete deliverance
- *Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, not according to what we deserve, but according to our hope in You*





# Discussion

- How many different ways does David command people to praise God?
- What reasons does the psalmist give for why we should worship God?
- The psalmist states that *the “earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”* What does that mean?



# Discussion

- Why does the psalmist paraphrase for us echoes of the creation narrative? What connection does that have with worship?
- The psalmist proclaims that army and war horses cannot save. Why would he mention this? What is the possible connection with the command to worship at the beginning of the Psalm?
- Explain the difference between the plans and counsel of men and of God.
- How can we demonstrate confidence in the Lord's protection and guidance for the future?