



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 34

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title states that this is "*A Psalm* of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed"
- The history of this event may be found in 1 Samuel 21:1-15
- Abimelech is not the person there mentioned; it was Achish, king of Gath, called here Abimelech, because that was a common name of the Philistine kings
- This is the second of the alphabetical Psalms, Psalm 25 was the first, each verse begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet except the Hebrew letter ו (v) is omitted



Introduction

- Even though David's behavior reflects lack and weakness of faith, God did not forsake him, but saved him with His mercy
- David's intention was to celebrate the goodness of God in his deliverance and offer praises and thanksgiving
- St. Peter in his first epistle 3:10-11 had quoted from this psalm
- This Psalm is included in the Agpeya's Third Hour prayers where we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit, so we offer our thanksgiving and praises



Introduction

Psalm Outline:

- Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3
- The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7
- All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10
- Teaching the People of God 34:11-14
- Living Under the Watchful Eye of God 34:15-16
- God, the Helper of the Humble 34:17-18
- God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22

Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3



- David begins by offering and giving thanks with great love
- He is saying that he will praise God as long as he lives, and he repeats it, saying, *His praise shall continually be in my mouth*
- The word always does not mean every moment, every day, every night; but it means that he will do so in the proper time and place, to the end of his life, even more, as those Psalms will be sung to the end of time, David will thus, through others, *bless the Lord at all times.*
- God's children have reason to bless God in times of adversity as well as prosperity, all things work together for their good

Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3



- The true spirituality is manifested through the internal constant joy, expressed in continual praise, even in the darkest moments
- It is befitting to thank and praise God at all times, and in all situations, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* (Philippians 4:4)
- *be in my mouth* The words in our mouth are just declaring what is in our heart
- According to the scholar Origen, “he who gives God thanks at the time of joy, is paying back a debt; Whereas he who give Him thanks at the time of tribulation, becomes His creditor.”

Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3



- David might have boasted in himself
- The 1 Samuel account describes how David cleverly won his freedom by pretending madness, but he knew that he was saved by God's hand, not his own wisdom
- David is saying that he will not be alone in blessing God for His kindness, but others too will bless Him; for, whosoever shall hear of it will praise and bless God, who enabled David by such cleverness to save himself
- We are warned by the saintly fathers against misunderstanding the true meaning of meekness or humility

Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3



- For, although we know our own weakness, it is appropriate to trust in the work of God, who grants us the ability to practice the impossible as St. Paul says, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13)
- St. Ambrose says, “Beware lest you may bring yourself to perdition while practicing these things. Do not seek to appear more humble or godly than you should be, lest you would be seeking glory by abstaining from it; for many who attempt to hide their optional poverty, love, and fasting, from the eyes, would be secretly seeking the admiration of others, through their attempt itself; Namely, they would be seeking commendation, while pretending to be far away from it.”

Praising God and Invite Others to Do the Same 34:1-3



- The humble, does not only glorify God, but draws the others, as well, to join him in glorifying God's name
- He exhorts them not only to praise God individually, but to join and unite with him in praising God
- *magnify, or exalt*, God is in no need of being glorified; but we, with the spirit of humility, should show forth, and publicly celebrate His majesty and greatness, when we experience His mighty power in our deliverance from any threatening evil
- We should then, with the psalmist, attribute our safety, not to our own cleverness or power, but to the care of God, who watches over us
- God cannot be made great by men, we can only declare how great He is

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- David now proceeds to give reasons why God should be praised and glorified
- David himself and others had found by experience, that He was a God of hearing and answering prayer
- When he was seriously pursued by Saul, he fled to the Lord, beseeched His assistance, approached Him with confidence, “*and He heard me*” with His usual kindness and mercy
- The mercy of God raised up Ahimelech the priest, (1 Samuel 21:6,8) to supply him with weapons and provisions
- Soon after he fell into the hands of Achis, king of the Philistines, but through the protection of God, he escaped the danger

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- At that time, he did not trust his own wisdom, but he sought the protection and guidance of God, the same when he fled to Gath, and when he fled from Gath
- And the consequence of his trust was, that He *delivered me from all my fear*
- In moving from “*I*” to “*They*,” in verse 5, David indicates that this experience was not his alone
- Many others have known and will know what it is to set the focus of their loving trust upon God and receive His help
- They draw radiance from God’s own glory
- This radiance is evidence that one has truly *looked to Him*

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- Later, the Apostle Paul would explain much the same thought, *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- *They, the humble ones looked* up to God in prayer when in distressed for deliverance and *their faces were not ashamed*, so this is why they should join in praising and magnifying the Lord
- David also knew that God would never forsake the one who trusts in Him
- God would give him confidence in the moment and justification in time

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- David again emphasized his personal experience of these truths
- He was the one; he was the *poor man* who *cried out* to God, and God graciously answered
- He shows the necessity of having a path to God when in trouble, by his own example
- He was in so lowly state, that he had to beg some food from Ahimelech the priest
- He *cried*, in faith and confidence, knocked by fervent prayer at the door of divine mercy, and *the Lord heard him*

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- He already proved by example, he now proves by reason, that we should approach God in all confidence; because *The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them*
- Those who fear God and have such a protector waiting on their need, should feel the greatest internal peace and security
- David was at a real low point; yet he was still filled with praise and trust, even knowing that God had an angelic camp *all around him*
- This verse gives support to a *guardian angel* for everyone

The Testimony of David's Deliverance 34:4-7



- *“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 18:10)
- There are two views about the meaning of *the angel of the Lord*
- According to many, it means a heavenly messenger sent to protect the righteous, and to fight against their enemies
- While others believe it is the Lord Himself, who came down to earth as a Redeemer and a Savior (Genesis 48:16; Exodus 23:20,23,32:34; Judges 13:15-22; Malachi 3:1)
- May be the psalmist uses it here in a general sense for the Divine manifestation of protection

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- After telling of his own experience, David challenged the readers to experience God's goodness for themselves
- *taste and see*, There is no other way of really knowing how good God is
- *Taste* and sight are physical senses, ways in which we interact with the material world
- In some ways, faith is like a spiritual sense, and with it we interact with the spiritual world
- To *taste* and to *see* are like trusting God, loving Him, seeking Him, looking unto Him

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- It is a call to experience the true love; for *God is love*
- David was sure that the one who did *taste and see* – or, who trusted in God – would not be forsaken
- God would make him *blessed*
- Both Hebrews 6:5 and 1 Peter 2:3 use this verse to urge those who, after being spiritually regenerated, begin to grow, and to require nourishment
- St. Augustine says, “In case you still not understand, you would become like king Achish, (1 Samuel 2:15); David will change his appearance, desert you, and go on his way,”

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- St. Jerome says, “Every goodness you possess is a taste of the Lord. Men would become perfect, once they perceive that they are not perfect.”
- After exhorting them to try how sweet is the Lord, he now encourages them to fear Him, that is, to observe His commandments
- David thought that to *fear the Lord* was much like trusting Him and experiencing His goodness
- If men really experience God’s goodness, if they really experience the blessedness of trusting Him, they will also have an appropriate fear of the Lord

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- By approaching we begin, by tasting we advance, and by fear we are made perfect
- *those who fear Him*, There can be no want of things essential to their happiness, whether spiritual or temporal, for this life or for that which is to come
- God will bestow upon them every needed blessing
- All their needs will be abundantly supplied
- The statement here cannot be regarded as absolutely true
- That is, it cannot mean that they who fear the Lord will never, in any instance, be hungry or thirsty

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- But it is evidently intended to be a general affirmation and is in accordance with the other statements which occur in the Bible about the advantages of true religion in securing temporal as well as spiritual blessings from God
- What God denies them He will give them grace to be content without and then they do not want it
- St. Paul had all and abounded, because he was content, *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content...indeed I have all and abound. I am full,”* Philippians 4:11,18

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- Some suppose *the young lions* here to represent the proud and violent, as in Job 4:10
- But it is simpler to interpret it literally
- The point is that the strongest beasts of prey, most capable of providing for themselves, may suffer want, not so God's people
- If such are the blessings promised to those who fear the Lord, how essential to know what the fear of the Lord is
- David knew that the good thing was not due to his own strength or might; it was the goodness of God extended to *those who seek the Lord*

All Are Exhorted to Taste and See the Goodness of God 34:8-10



- Those who put their hope, not in riches, but in God, as those who fear God, they, however poor they may be, *shall not lack any good thing*
- These words have a higher meaning also, namely, that those who are attached to the vanity of this world always hunger and need, for they are always craving, materialistic, and desirous of having more
- *but those who seek the Lord* Those who seek a thing of infinite value, a thing greater than their desires, *shall not lack any good thing*

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- David having exhorted all to fear God, now shows the advantage of this fear, and in what it consists
- He assumes the role of the teacher, and, addressing his readers as *children*
- He was a man of war, a psalmist, and a musician
- Yet his concern was not to teach his people how to use the sword or spear; how to play the harp, nor how to govern
- But he was concerned to teach them how to *fear the Lord*, which is better than all the arts and knowledge; and even greater than offering sacrifices

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- David believed that *the fear of the lord* needs teaching and training
- This verse was used by St. John Chrysostom to show that godliness is an art, which needs an instructor
- He says, “Acquiring the fear of the Lord needs teaching ... Do not you see that virtue needs to be taught?”
- According to St. Clement of Alexandria, the Speaker here is the Savior Himself, who calls His believers to listen to Him, He is *the Teacher*
- What he expects from them, *listen to me*, not only give him the hearing, but observe and obey him

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- *the fear of the Lord*, this is the first lesson to be taught
- It is the beginning of wisdom; it includes every duty, and regards the whole worship of God, and the manner of it
- The end of *the fear of the Lord* Is a true and a happy life
- St. Augustine comments on verse 12 and says, “He asks a question. Does not everyone among you answer, I? Is there any man among you that does not love life... and does not love to see good days?... if the Christian loves good days, let him hearken unto Him teaching and saying, ‘Come, ye children, hearken unto Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.’ Life and good days. Hear, and do.”

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- And this is an invitation to us
- Do we want a quality life?
- Do we want to prolong our days enjoying what God has given to us in this life?
- Do we want to be able to continue to taste and see the Lord's goodness in this world?
- If so, then David identify the true and only way to happiness both in this world and that to come, verses 13,14
- *Keep your tongue from evil*, Beware of offending God through your tongue, by lies, by untruth, by slander, etc.

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- He begins with the tongue because sins of the tongue are numerous, and abundantly noted in the Psalms (Psalm 5:9, 10:7, 12:3, 15:3, 50:19, 57:4, 73:8-9, etc.)
- They are more difficult to avoid than any others, *"If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."* (James 3:2)
- Having prohibited in general all manner of sins of the tongue, David makes special mention of the sin of lying, as being much more serious and produce countless other sins
- From sins of word, he passes to sins of deed,

Teaching the People of God

34:11-14



- *Depart from evil*, This denotes that evil is near to men; it keeps close to them, and should be declined
- It regards all sorts of evil; evil men, and their evil company; evil things, evil words and works, and all appearance of evil
- We must not only *depart from evil*, but we must *do good*,
“*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” (James 4:17)
- Whatever the word of God directs, or suggests should be done
- *Seek peace*, He finally warns us to avoid sins of thought, such as anger, hatred, envy, and enmities, that thus we may have and retain true peace in everything we are concerned with

Living Under the Watchful Eye of God 34:15-16



- He proves the claim he made in vs 13 & 14, namely, that those who avoid sin, and observe the commandments of God, have *life and good days*
- Because God constantly regards the just, and always hears their prayers
- God, on His part, gives a personal care to the righteous who fear Him, particularly in the time of tribulation
- If the just have any indication of evils approaching them, and they cry to God, they find His ears open and attentive to them
- God watches for them, and saves them from many dangers

Living Under the Watchful Eye of God 34:15-16



- St. Isaac the Syrian says, “The prayer of the humble reaches from his mouth directly to God’s ears.”
- It was also important to know that there were not only blessings for obedience, but curses for disobedience
- Those who are trapped in their *evil* and rebellion and completely unwilling to change could find their *remembrance* gone *from the earth*
- God turns away His face from the wicked, and punishes them by causing their very memory to perish from among men
- God is determined that the ungodly shall not prosper; He sets Himself with all His might to overthrow them

God, the Helper of the Humble

34:17-18



- He proves the claim that *The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous*
- There is no blessing granted to man in his present state greater than this
- Their outward troubles; through afflictions of body, losses, the persecutions of men; out of all these the Lord sooner or later delivers His people who cry unto Him
- The promise is not indeed, that they shall be delivered from all trouble on earth, but the idea is that God is able to rescue them from trouble here and there will be a sure and complete deliverance from all trouble hereafter

God, the Helper of the Humble

34:17-18



- We may also say from their inward troubles that comes through the workings of corruption in their hearts; through the violent assaults of Satan, the blasphemous thoughts he brings into them, and his temptations to sin
- *broken heart*, Those who are crushed with afflictions, “*But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*” Proverbs 15:13
- Or with a sense of sin, and sorrow for it, for which their hearts pierce them, and they are wounded by it, and broken with it
- They may think that God is far away, when He is really very near

God, the Helper of the Humble

34:17-18



- He may sometimes seem to them and others to stand afar off
- God never deserts the just when they are afflicted and troubled in heart by injuries and persecutions
- But He comes and manifests Himself to them in a gracious way and He comes and dwells with them
- He is always at hand, ministering patience and comforting them with His heavenly consolations, to enable them to cope against their trials, which will not be of long duration
- *a contrite spirit*, It is the repentant humble mourning heart
- God graciously absolves him the sinner who condemns himself

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,* Here we are reminded that the faithful in this life are not promised an exemption from poverty, hunger, need, disease, dishonor, persecution, oppression, but are only promised spiritual consolation here, and full and perfect delivery hereafter
- *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)
- David spoke from his own experience
- God's deliverance was real in David's life and still is real in the experience of many of God's people

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- In addition, the righteous suffer afflictions because they are so imperfectly righteous
- They need purifying and chastening, to free them from the harm of sin from which they are never wholly freed while they continue in the flesh, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (Acts 14:22)
- As breaking the bones is a forcible metaphor for the torture of pain that afflicts the bodily framework (Psalm 51:8; Isaiah 38:13), or for cruel oppression (Micah 3:3)
- So, keeping them signifies the safe preservation of the man's whole being

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- This seems to apply to the glory of their resurrection, to which, undoubtedly, the expression of our Savior, *“A hair from your head shall not be lost,”* also applies
- According to the Holy Gospel of St. John, David spoke not only of his own experience
- He also spoke prophetically of Jesus Christ
- St. John explained that the Roman soldiers who supervised the crucifixion of Jesus came to His body on the cross, expecting to hasten and guarantee His death in the traditional way – breaking the legs of the crucified victim

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- When they looked carefully, they learned that Jesus Christ was already dead and they pierced His side to confirm it
- St. John wrote, *“For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken.’”* (John 19:36)
- While the righteous is rescued out of all evils, evil brings the wicked to his death
- His evil ways work out their own punishment, and divine retribution overtakes him, *“What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”* (Romans 6:21)

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23)
- *And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned,* Our Lord Jesus Christ presented to us the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), to compare between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked
- All wicked men hate the righteous, both Jesus Christ the righteous, and His people
- Because they do not run into wickedness with them
- They will be charged at the day of judgment and will be convicted of all their wickedness

God's Care for His Righteous Ones 34:19-22



- They will be found guilty and will be punished with everlasting destruction
- The Psalm concludes by predicting the end of the just which is very different from that of the wicked
- *The Lord redeems from all evil, the souls of his servants*
- His servants those who trust in Him will never be deserted or forsaken
- Joyfully will we serve Him who so graciously purchases us with His blood and delivers us by His power

Discussion



- In what way is praising God a choice?
- How can you guide your thoughts rather than being led by them?
- How does one become radiant by looking to God?
- Who is the angel of the Lord?



Discussion

- How does one “taste” that the Lord is good? See?
- What does it mean to fear God?
- Who are the “children” that David refers to?
- What is the “secret” to a good and long life?

Discussion



- What does it mean that the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous?
- What do you think the result may be for a person if the face of the Lord is against him?
- How can we understand verse 19 in light of the fact that some seemingly righteous people may live the majority of their lives facing affliction?