



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 44

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Introduction

- This psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation Of the sons of Korah*
- St. Augustine comments on the title and says, “This Psalm is addressed “to the sons of Korah,” as its title shows. Now Korah is equivalent to the word baldness; and we find in the Gospel that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified in “the place of a skull.” It is clear then that this Psalm is sung to the “sons of His ‘Passion.’” Now we have on this point a most certain and most evident testimony from the Apostle Paul; because that at the time when the Church was suffering under the persecutions of the Gentiles, he quoted from hence a verse, to insert by way of consolation, and encouragement to patience.”



Introduction

- St. Augustine continues and says, “The title then is not simply ‘To the sons of Korah,’ but, ‘*For understanding*, to the sons of Korah.”
- This Psalm is a hymn expressive not of an individual but of national feeling
- It speaks of the nation of Israel in a season of great defeat, calling out to God for rescue
- It is not certain who was the writer of this psalm, nor when it was written, and to what time it belongs



Introduction

- Some believe it was composed by one of the Babylonian captivity, and that it gives a description of the church and people of God in those times
- Some believe it was written by David and as a prophet, he speaks of future times and represent the church
- This group connects this Psalm with Psalm 60, and suppose that the occasion of both Psalms was an Edomite raid upon Judah while David was occupied with his campaign against the Ammonites and Syrians



Introduction

- While others believe that the Psalm could be applied to the New Testament, since 44:22 is cited by the Apostle Paul, Romans 8:36, and is applied to his times, and as descriptive of the suffering state and condition of the church then
- And some believe that it refers to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and to the persecutions which occurred under him during the Maccabees time



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8
- The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16
- They Remained Faithful 44:17-22
- The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- This passage points out to the importance of oral tradition as a means of preserving the memory of the past
- Much of the early history of Israel was doubtless preserved by oral tradition for a long period before it was committed to writing
- The church being in distress calls to mind the past mercies and works of God for His people, in order to encourage her faith and hope
- The psalmist received a special legacy from his *fathers*, from their elder generation
- Those *fathers* were careful to tell them what God did in generations past

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- It is the duty of fathers to present to their children the experience of their life with God
- The expression, *heard with our ears*, may denote that they were listening with great pleasure and reflect the magnitude of their interest
- Father Papias, disciple of St. John the Evangelist and a companion of St. Polycarp says, “With no hesitation I add what I have learned and received of interpretations from the elders, which I am sure of their soundness ... For I do not believe that what I learn from the books would benefit me as much as what I get from the live voice.”

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- Those of the elder generation told the psalmist of the great work God did when He *drove out* the Canaanites and *planted* Israel in the land promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- Israel owed its possession of Canaan not to its own courage but to God's help
- The many complete victories which Israel obtained over the Canaanites, under the command of Joshua, were not to be attributed to themselves; nor could they claim the glory of them
- The metaphor of planting is frequently applied to the establishment of Israel in Canaan (Exodus 15:17; 2 Samuel 7:10)

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- Israel is compared to a tree which struck root and spread its branches far and wide which means God assigned them a fixed and permanent residence
- It would also mean that God made them increase; multiplied them; spread them over the land, as a vine spreads
- The hand of God drove out heathen nations to plant His own people
- That is God's plan in the life of man; He intends to uproot every corrupt (nation) in the heart, to set His (Kingdom) inside it (Luke 17:21)

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- The thought of the preceding verse is still further emphasized that they owed their establishment in the promised land wholly to God
- He who had driven out the nations in the days of their fathers; He who had established His people peacefully in the new land was able to intervene now and save them
- In reading the story of the conquest in the days of Joshua, there were times when Israel did *nothing* – God alone did the work (Joshua 24:12-13)
- As their passing over into it through Jordan as on dry land and the manner in which Jericho, the first city of it, was taken

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- There were other times when Israel had to fight, but their fighting would have accomplished nothing without the *right hand* of God on their behalf
- It was as important to have the face and favor of God for them as having the *right hand* or *arm* of the Lord
- These battles happened long before the generation of the time of the psalmist
- The *fathers* spoke not only of what they personally had experienced of God, but they also taught what God did many generations before

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- St. Augustine says, “Thy ‘right hand’ is Thy Power: Thine ‘arm’ is Thy Son Himself. And ‘the light of Thy countenance.’ What means this, but that Thou were present with them, in miracles of such a sort that Thy presence was perceived. For when God’s presence with us appears by any miracle, do we see His face with our own eyes? No. It is by the effect of the miracle He intimates to man His presence.”
- The psalmist here uses the singular number, *my King*, as expressive of his own feelings, though he doubtless means also to speak in the name of the people

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- The psalmist acknowledge no other king but God, no other absolute Lord and Master
- The remembrance of the past gives confidence for the present and the future
- God's strength must still avail for the deliverance of His people, and in Him alone do they trust
- *Command victories for Jacob*, Being King, He has a right to *command*
- The word "*Jacob*" here is used to denote the descendants of Jacob, or the people of God

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- *we will push down our enemies*, The metaphor is taken from animals pushing with their horns those that oppose them, and in self defense; there seems to be an allusion to Deuteronomy 33:17, “*His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; together with them He shall push the peoples to the end of the earth.*”
- The Lord's name served instead of weapons and enabled those who used it to crush their enemies
- One can work wonders when in union and communion with God
- In His name believers fight with their spiritual enemies, that *rise up against them*, as sin, Satan, and through the power of the Lord, they *trample* them down

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- The author of the Psalm again speaks as expressing his own feelings and stating the grounds of his confidence and hope
- At the same time, he doubtless expresses the feelings of the people, and speaks in their name
- He assured God that their faith was in Him and His power, not in their own strength or skill
- They, under God's guidance, pushed out the heathen, and gained their land, not by skill of weapons or power of arms, but by the power of God alone
- Therefore, they will not rely upon outward confidences, of which other men make such boast, but upon the omnipotence of God

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- The help comes with the visible enemies as well as with the spiritual enemy
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Not in weapons do I trust - that is, not in my strength, nor in my righteousness, but in the mercy of God.”
- Verse 7 carries a double action of God
- He is blessing His people and defeating His enemies
- And therefore – the psalmist is expecting God to grant deliverance from enemies and give success
- God has been the object of their praises in the past, and to Him they will give thanks continually

The Psalmist Describes the Mercies of God 44:1-8



- It is not a momentary or temporary expression of the psalmist's feelings, but it will be a habitual and constant service
- St. John Chrysostom shares his thoughts on verse 8 and says, "This after all, is our glory, this our boast, in this we take pride in the company of everyone, not for the fact that we have a great and wonderful city, nor that we were the first to overcome, nor that we prevail by bodily strength, but because we have a God who is true – in this we boast, not only when You help us but even when You abandon us. This, you see, is the meaning of all day long, ... nothing can parallel this boasting."
- *Selah*, A pause comes in properly here

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- These verses are a powerful and bitter complaint
- The psalmist begins to contrast the past glories of the nation's history with its present sadness and distress
- He now stated his great present need
- They felt that God did not fight for Israel and therefore they were without hope in battle
- God has seemed to *cast them off*, has *put them to shame*, allowed them to be defeated, slain, and carried into captivity
- He no longer *go out with* their *armies* to secure them victory over their enemies, but waits distant and covers them with confusion

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- St. Augustine comments on verse 9 and says, “For there was a time when Christians were persecuted; when in every place they were outcasts, when in every place it used to be said, “He is a Christian!” as if it conveyed an insult and reproach. Where then is He, “our God, our King,” who “commands salvation unto Jacob”? Where is He who did all those works, which “our fathers have told us”? Where is He who is hereafter to do all those things which He revealed unto us by His Spirit? Is He changed? No. These things are done in order to “understanding, for the sons of Korah.” For we ought to “understand” something of the reason, why He has willed we should suffer all these things in the meantime.”

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- What came upon the people was not because of the strength of their enemies, as much as because God has cast them off for some time
- The description implies, not a single defeat, but a somewhat continued period of depression, during which several *armies* have been beaten, several battles lost, multitudes slain, and great numbers carried away captive
- *You have given us up like sheep intended for food*, The psalmist understood that for Israel, as a covenant nation, victory or defeat was in the hand of the Lord

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- Therefore, if they were defeated, *scattered*, sold into slavery, made a *reproach*, it was because God's hand was behind it in some way
- Notice the repetition of the word *You*
- The Lord seemed to hand over His people to any nation who might choose to make war upon them
- *You sell Your people for next to nothing*, The whole nation is regarded as delivered over to the will of their enemies
- Meanwhile no good result was understandable from all the miseries of Israel

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- So far as the psalmist could discern, the Lord's name did not receive any honor from the sorrows of His people
- They were given away to their enemies as if they were of so little value and not to be worth the ordinary price of slaves, and the Lord did not care to gain by them so long as they suffer
- If God had been glorified by all this wretchedness it could have been endured patiently
- But it was the reverse
- The Lord's name had been despised by the insulting heathen, who counted the overthrow of Israel to be the defeat of God Himself

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- It is attribution to God of human motives and feelings, as though the surrender of His people might have seemed more justifiable if He had received some equivalent for them
- That could be considered as a rebuke addressed to the people as well; on account of that God seeks no benefit for Himself out of their tribulation; for He did not sell them to their enemies, anticipating price or profit; but seeks their edification, their eternal salvation, and their glory

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- They would be reproached, not so much as weak and powerless themselves, but rather as having a weak and powerless God
- The word *neighbors* here refers to surrounding nations
- They were *reproached, scorned, and derided* as forsaken by God
- Surrounding nations treated them with contempt
- They no longer fear them and as having nothing to entitle them to respect
- These nations point to their fate as a parable of a people abandoned by their God, and they became the subject of mocking songs, *A shaking of the head among the peoples*

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- According to St. Augustine, “a ‘*shaking of the head*’ by way of insult. ‘They spoke with their lips, they shook the head.’ This they did to the Lord: this to all His Saints also, whom they were able to pursue, to lay hold of, to mock, to betray, to afflict, and to slay.”
- *My dishonor is continually before me*, The psalmist here is represented as the head of the people and expresses the sense of disgrace
- He is identifying himself with the people and speaks of the national disgrace as his own
- *the shame*, The conviction and the evidence of his disgrace is constantly present with him

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- The psalmist was brought low, and not only because of the defeat and disgrace suffered from their enemies
- Worse was the sense that it was because God had abandoned Israel, or perhaps was against them
- In fact, the misery of Israel was so great that eventually the very name, Jew, became a *byword*
- *the shame of my face has covered me*, He felt before God that the divine abandonment was well deserved, and before man, that he and his people were wicked and disgraceful indeed now that heavenly help was gone

The Psalmist Points Out their Present Miserable State 44:9-16



- *the voice of him*, That does not only *reproach* him, which he could bear; but blaspheme God because of them is something he cannot tolerate
- The reproaches of the heathen were most commonly blasphemies, since they consisted very mainly of mocking taunting expressions against the God of Israel
- The reproach which the enemy and the *avenger* cast upon them was absolute blasphemy against God
- There is no trouble more grievous to a good soul than blasphemy and dishonor done to God

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- The psalmist felt compelled to tell God that despite the feeling they had been forsaken, they had not departed from Him
- They remembered Him and remained faithful to His *covenant*
- He claims that Israel had not turned away from her loyalty to God
- Sincere believers will not forget their God, even during hardships and sufferings
- They have kept themselves from apostacy and idolatry despite what they have encountered

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- The psalmist strongly emphasizes his complaint by maintaining that the adversities from which they are suffering have not come upon the people through any fault of their own
- He honestly, and not self righteously, makes the case that their present distress was *not* due to unaddressed sin or rebellion
- The actions of the Lord in handing His people over to defeat and not going with their armies and giving them over to their enemies is simply rather unexpected in light of these things not being the result of sin

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- *Our heart has not turned back*, They have not turned away from servicing God, they have not apostatized from Him; and they have not fallen into idolatry
- *Nor have our steps departed from Your way*, They had not departed from the path given by God or His commandments
- He said that because it is easy to falsely pretend sincerity of heart, which men cannot discern nor deny, but they prove it from the blamelessness and righteousness of their lives and actions
- They were faithful in heart and life
- In firm but polite protest, the psalmist insisted that Israel's faithfulness to God had been answered by calamity sent by God

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- Though completely crushed and made desolate and driven as it were to associate with creatures such as *jackals*, which haunt deserted ruins, yet Israel remained faithful
- *the place of jackals*, Is a proverbial expression for a scene of ruin and desolation, a waste wilderness occupied only by wild beasts (Isaiah 13:22,34:13; Jeremiah 9:11,10:22)
- The psalmist is telling God that by inflicting upon them one defeat after another, He has at last brought them to this state; that they have become like a place extremely desolate, such as *jackals* love, (Isaiah 13:21-22) and therefore full of horror and danger

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- The psalmist continued to insist that Israel had remained faithful
- If Israel had forgotten the true God or fallen away to the worship of false or strange gods - then her defeat against her foreign enemies would have been fully accounted for
- But they had remembered the Lord and had not prayed to idols
- If this had been the case, it would be known to God and there was no use in denying it
- One may observe here the belief that calamities were punishments for sin; and that when this suffering occurred, and there had been no known wrongdoing, it was extraordinary

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- St. Augustine says, “He ‘knows,’ and yet He ‘searches them out’? If He knows the secrets of the heart, what do the words, ‘Shall not God search it out,’ do there? He ‘knows’ it in Himself; He ‘searches it out’ for our sakes. For it is for this reason God sometimes ‘searches a thing out;’ and speaks of that becoming known to Himself, which He is Himself making known to you. He is speaking of His own work, not of His knowledge.”
- Then the psalmist claims that not only have they not been unfaithful to God, but they are actually suffering as martyrs for His sake
- This verse is quoted by St Paul in Romans 8:36

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- St. Paul quoted it to encourage his converts in view of the possibility that they might have to face even death for Christ's sake
- Even in such terrible defeat and disgrace, none of this can separate us from the love of Christ or change our destiny as being more than conquerors in Him
- They suffered in faithfulness to God, and because of their faithfulness to God
- This verse suggests that suffering may not be a punishment, but the spiritual fight effect

They Remained Faithful

44:17-22



- Their suffering is not on account of our national sins; or because there is idolatry, but it is because they are the worshippers of the true God, and they are, therefore, martyrs
- St. John Chrysostom says, “while it is a great thing to persevering serving God, and not to stray to another, it is much greater thing to maintain such love under the constant threat of death and the onset of daily risk.”
- He also says, “Why does he say for Your sake? Because we had the opportunity, he is saying, to change allegiance, to abandon the ancestral way of life, and to be in safety; we chose instead to suffer ill-treatment and preserve our patrimony, rather than enjoy peace after abandoning our patrimony.”



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- The appeal to God is now made, after the case has been fully represented
- God has always previously maintained the cause of His people, and given them victory over their enemies, unless they had fallen away from Him (1-8)
- Now He has acted otherwise - He has allowed their enemies to triumph (9-16)
- And there was no reason for His desertion of them (17-22)
- Surely, if they call upon Him, He will change His mind and come to their aid



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- The appeal, therefore, is made briefly, but in the most moving terms
- What does the psalmist mean by the terms, “Awake”, “sleep”, and, “Arise”?
- “By the word “sleep” the psalm refers to God’s perseverance and longsuffering on us.” (St. John Chrysostom)
- God neither slumbers nor sleeps and His eyes are always upon His people
- The psalmist does not really believe that God *sleeps*
- He watches over them night and day



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- But sometimes He seems and is thought to be asleep
- As when wicked men triumph over the righteous
- When their judgment seems to delay
- And when the saints are under painful afflictions, and the Lord seems to disregard them, and does not appear for their deliverance
- This sense was powerfully captured when Jesus slept in the boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- Then he asked God, *Why do You hide Your face* ‘why do You turn away from us, and refuse to aid us, and leave us to these mercilessness sufferings?
- He addresses God using language a man would use in addressing his fellow men and it indicates earnestness but not irreverence
- In body and soul Israel was at the crisis point and in *the dust* of shame and defeat
- The expression implies great affliction
- Their hearts are low as low can be, as low as the dust beneath the soles of men's feet



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- They brought very low, humbled, as it were, to the earth, so weakened that it has no strength in it
- *Our body clings to the ground*, They are like animals that are lying flat upon the earth and that cannot rise
- As person that lie flat, being defeated
- God is the help of His people, and He is the only one
- He can help and does, when none else can
- *Arise for our help*, A short, but a complete and inclusive prayer, much to the point, clear, simple, and urgent



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- The psalmist has stated Israel's problem as clearly and strongly as possible
- We might expect him to be angry with God or to lose hope
- Instead, he showed his trust in God even in his pain and disappointment
- He made his final appeal not on the basis of what Israel deserved, but for the *sake* of God's mercy (lovingkindness)
- Although they are aware of their sincerity, loyalty, and how they worship and serve God, but they plead and expect these blessings only upon God's free and rich mercy



The Psalmist Calls Upon the Lord for Deliverance 44:23-26

- St. John Chrysostom says, “Do you see the humility and contrite heart? On what grounds do they appeal to be saved? Lovingkindness, mercy; as though deprived of good deeds, as though not having any claim on salvation, despite being in a position to take pride in so many troubles and dangers, they referred everything to God. Let us too, living in the age of grace, imitate them and offer up glory to God, to whom be the glory for ages of ages. amen,.”

Discussion



- How does the psalmist betray his faith when he speaks of God's works in history?
- How does the psalmist speak of God's sovereignty in this Psalm?
- What does the psalmist say about forgetting in this Psalm?
- Although the first section contrasted God's ability to bring victory in the past to present in the second section, what do we find is the actual situation in the present?



Discussion

- How might this last section compliment what was expressed in the opening sections?
- What is the quality of God's character to which they ultimately appeal?
- How does the psalmist express anger and other negative emotions against God? How are these emotions embedded in the context of trusting God?



Discussion

- What is the greater spiritual lesson being taught here?
- What prayer concludes this Psalm?
- Why did the psalm writer believe that the Lord would want to answer their prayer?
- Why does the Lord allow us to face difficulties and defeat, even when we are being faithful to Him?