



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 50

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Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *A Psalm of Asaph*
- It is the first of twelve Psalms he composed
- Asaph was a Levite, son of Berachiah, and a great singer and musician of David and Solomon's time (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 16:7, 25:6)
- He is mentioned with great respect in Nehemiah 12:46
- It was said about him that he sounded with cymbals of brass, 1 Chronicles 15:19
- His band, sons or companions, were also eminent in the days of David, as we learn from 1 Chronicles 25



Introduction

- 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 2 Chronicles 29:30 add that Asaph was a prophet in his musical compositions
- He is called a seer - one on whom the Spirit of God rested; and seems from this, his education, and natural talent to be well qualified to compose hymns or Psalms in the honor of God
- It is not known on what particular occasion this Psalm was written
- But some believe that this Psalm belongs to the pre-exile period, when Jerusalem existed in the perfect of beauty



Introduction

- The Psalm main theme is “Praise and godly living is more important to God than external religious practices.”
- False religion is a significant theme of both Old and New Testaments
- The prophets pronounced judgment on those who claimed to be faithful, but whose lives failed to live up to their claims
- Jesus confronted the same problem with the scribes and Pharisees
- The Psalm is a solemn vision of the day of judgement
- The Lord is represented as calling the whole earth to hear His declaration



Introduction

- He declares the nature of the worship which He accepts
- He is looking for honest sacrifices of thanksgiving
- God outlines some of their sins: Rejecting instruction, robbery, adultery, evil, deceit, slander
- The Psalm ends with God delivers a warning to those who have forgotten Him, and He tells them how to achieve salvation
- This Psalm deals with man's duty towards God and his duty towards his neighbor
- It addresses the nature of acceptable service, and the obligations of social morality



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6
- The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15
- A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21
- Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- Asaph the psalmist began by referring to God in terms of utmost majesty, using several of the names in Scripture that refer to God
- Some have observed, that these three names, *The Mighty One*, *God the LORD*, have three very distinctive accents set to them in the Hebrew language, and which being joined to a verb singular, *Has spoken*, carries the mystery of the Trinity
- However, most believe that all the names refer to Christ the Son of God, and who is our righteousness, and to whom, He being the eternal Logos, spoke here
- He *has spoken* all things out of nothing in creation

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- He addressed all the inhabitants of the world
- The call is made to all *the earth*; from one end to the other, all should appear before Him
- This can be applied to the first coming of Jesus Christ
- Jesus Christ, on His arrival in this world, *has spoken* the words of His Gospel; and He has *called the earth*, inviting all to hear Him
- The Psalmist tells us in what place God began to speak
- In Zion, as it was foretold by Isaiah 2:3, "*For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*"
- The place where He was supposed to reside, and where He would now sit in judgment

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- *The perfection of beauty*, because of the Temple being there, God's dwelling place (Psalm 48:2; Lamentations 2:15), God's perfect beauty shines forth from Zion
- St. John Chrysostom says, "From there the apostles were dispatched to the whole world, ... there occurred the resurrection, there the ascension, there the prelude and commencement of our salvation, there the ineffable teaching began to be proclaimed. There the Father was first revealed, the Only-Begotten known, and the wonderful grace of the Spirit given ... considering all this, the inspired author call it God's beautiful maturity, it is His goodness and lovingkindness, and His beneficence to all people"

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- According to the Septuagint, "beauty" is in connection to God, while in Hebrew it appears that to Zion
- The spiritual beauty of the Church reveals God's beauty for He bought her by His precious blood
- And others say that is, Jesus Christ; He is the perfection of beauty
- He is *fairer than the sons of men*, (Psalm 45); He is more glorious than the angels in heaven
- The glory of all the divine perfections is obvious and seen in His work of salvation, as well as in Himself

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- He now in verse 3 foretells the second coming of Christ
- In His first coming He came veiled and in the form of a servant, in meekness to redeem us by His death and passion
- But in His second coming He will come manifestly and revealed, in all His power; not in a humble manger, but in the clouds of heaven
- And when He comes, *shall not keep silent* as He did in His first coming, when, *“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth”* (Isaiah 53:7)

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- He will come with a trumpet and with a dreadful noise, as we read in Matthew 24:31, *“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*
- And, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”*
- And, in 1 Corinthians 15:52, *“at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound”*

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- *A fire shall devour before Him*, Referring to the end of the world and of everything in it, of which St. Peter says, “*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*” (2 Peter 3:10)
- The meaning, then, is, *A fire shall devour before Him* to destroy everything on the face of the earth, *And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him*, the whole world will be in confusion
- Some say that it is the fire of the divine word making its way among the Gentiles, consuming their idolatry

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- Or, rather the fire of divine wrath coming upon the Jews and it may be literally understood of the fire that consumed their city and temple, as was predicted, Zechariah 11:1
- St. Augustine says, “He that came hidden, shall come manifest. Hidden He came to be judged, manifest He shall come to judge: hidden He came that He might stand before a judge, manifest He shall come that He may be judge even of judges.”

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- Heaven and earth are called upon to come together, as witnesses of His judgment, by which He will separate the faithful believers from hypocrites, or the wheat from the chaff
- There will be an immense crowd present
- *He shall call to the heavens from above*, All the Angels will be gathered, as we read in Matthew, “*When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy Angels with Him.*” (Matthew 25:31)
- *And to the earth*, He will call the earth too
- This great assembly will be called to *judge His people*
- Both heaven above and the earth beneath shall unite in condemning sin

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- To separate the good from the bad; as we read in Matthew, *“He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”* (Matthew 25:32)
- And *“So it will be at the end of the age, the Angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just;”* (Matthew 13:49)
- *Gather My saints*, The command is perhaps addressed to the angels who are God’s ministers of judgement (Matthew 24:31)
- *My saints*, The faithful members of God’s Church
- *Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice*, Explains who the saints are

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- These words are spoken by Christ to the angels to gather in His elect ones
- So, God first of all, will call to Him those who have shown their relationship to Him by sacrifice
- God makes it clear that He is not interested in sacrifice that is void of a holy lifestyle which does not reflect the relationship with Him
- God will accept those who have made a covenant with Him through sacrifice, good work
- Who have demonstrated that they are in a relationship with God by sacrificing

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- *declare His righteousness*, The psalmist hears the heavens, which have been gathered to witness the trial, proclaimed the justice of the Judge, as a guarantee of the impartiality of His judgement
- God most certainly will judge the earth, including all the wicked, and He will do so in *righteousness*
- It is an inspired prophecy of that day when the Lord shall discern between those who fear Him and those who do not
- *Selah*, Here one may well pause in reverent prostration and in humble prayer

The Mighty One and His Judgment 50:1-6



- St. Augustine says, “Truly this righteousness of God to us the ‘heavens have declared,’ the Evangelists have foretold. Through them we have heard that some will be on the right hand, to whom the Householder saith, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive.’ Receive what? ‘A kingdom.’ In return for what thing? ‘I was hungry, and ye gave Me to eat.’ What so valueless, what so earthly, as to break bread to the hungry? At so much is valued the kingdom of heaven ... ‘The heavens shall declare His righteousness, for God is Judge.’ Truly judge not confounding but severing. For ‘the Lord knows them that are His.’”



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- The previous verses are designed to bring the scene of the judgment before us
- The serious and grave scene now opens, and God Himself speaks
- He speaks to His people, beginning His judgment among them
- The faithful are called to receive a warning so that everyone may prepare himself
- The particular address is made to the *people* of God because the purpose of the Psalmist was to rebuke the customary tendency to rely on outward forms of religion while its spirituality and its power are denied



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- *I am God, your God*, A reason why we should hear Him who speaks
- He is our God; from which we have the strongest assurance that He knows how, and wishes to give us the most useful instruction
- He loves us; and, therefore, wishes to teach us what is most useful
- St. Augustine says, “He shall come and shall not keep silence; see how that even now, if ye hear, He is not silent...For if you do not hear, I will not speak to you... For if you do not hear even though I shall speak, it will not be to thee. When then shall I speak to you? If you hear. If you are my people.”



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- God did not *rebuke* His people for offering sacrifices
- He commanded them to do that
- It is for neglect of the outward ritual of religion - of sacrifice and offering
- *Which are continually before Me*, Rather, they have been continually before Him
- They are sufficiently numerous, always to be found on the altar
- The daily morning and evening sacrifices have been regularly offered, and the national worship thus kept up without a break



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- God does not look for sacrifices, as if He wanted them
- He rather looks for inner virtue, consisting in faith, hope, love, and obedience; such sacrifices are acceptable
- Another reason that God does not require sacrifice from us is that He is the Lord of everything, and if He wants sheep, or cattle, or birds, or any thing else, He can easily have them, without any trouble, He is their sovereign Master
- He was not interested in receiving *more* animal offerings *I will not take a bull from your house, Nor goats out of your folds*
- This was a rebuke of empty repetition of religious ceremonies



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- This shows that the sacrifices of the law were symbolical of higher and spiritual things, and were not pleasing to God except under their typical aspect
- When we sacrifice to God, we do not give Him something He does not have; our sacrifice is for *our sake* and not His
- *the cattle on a thousand hills*, This may mean either the cattle that roamed by thousands on the hills, or the cattle on endless hills
- All creation is God's, known to Him, and owned by Him, to be dealt with at His pleasure
- How, then, should He need gifts from men?



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- God does not need anything from men, either for His necessities or His convenience, and that is, because He neither hungers nor thirsts
- If He needs anything, His wants would be at once supplied, He is the Lord of all thing
- He could provide for Himself out of His own possessions; He would not plead to His own creatures
- *all its fullness*, All that fills the world; all that exists upon it
- The whole is at His disposal; to all that the earth produces He has a right



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- Can anyone suppose it possible, that God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the invisible Author of all things, both visible and invisible, need material sustenance, and can condescend to find any sustenance in *the flesh of bulls* and *blood of goats*?
- St. Augustine says, “You have heard what of us He requires not ... If of such things ye were thinking, now withdraw your thoughts from such things: think not to offer God any such thing. If thou hast a fat bull, kill for the poor: let them eat the flesh of bulls.”



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- Having established the insufficiency of sacrifice, without inner submission and love, the psalmist now teaches us, that it is by such inner acts of virtue that God is most pleased, and that it is through such acts we can be saved in the last judgment
- The one offering acceptable to God is praise and thanksgiving out of a pure, a life of obedience, and a living trust in Him
- God wants His people to present their sacrifices as the tributes of their gratitude
- *pay your vows to the Most High*, Pay to Him love, devotion, and true service and worship



The Judgment of God Against His People 50:7-15

- When trouble comes, do not trust people for relief, as hypocrites generally do, but give glory to Him, by relying upon His promises, and expect help from Him by a deep and heartfelt prayer
- God take pleasure and prefers the prayer of a broken heart to the burnt offerings, (Psalm 51:16-17)
- Prayer will honor God, and grateful perception of His answering mercy will also glorify Him
- St. John Chrysostom says, "Why, you ask, did He say, Call on Me? Why does He wait to be called by us? Because He wishes to achieve a closer relationship with us and a more ardent love for Him by giving and calling and receiving."

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- In the preceding verses God has reproached those who regarded the offering of sacrifice as the essence of religion
- He now turns to address the manifestly wicked man, the hypocrite, who repeated His commandments and proclaimed faithfulness to Him, while he deliberately disobey these commandments by his conduct
- He is asking them, Why do you profess to know My law, to profess to belong to My family, when you neither observe My law, nor keep My covenant?
- This was not addressed only to sinners; but to men who were teachers of others

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- God questioned their right to speak forth His word when their lives were caught in fundamental disobedience
- Their words *declare My statutes...My covenant in your mouth* spoke of God, but their lives dishonored Him
- They claimed the right of enforcing them against others, while in their own persons they place them at nothing, "and *know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.*" (Romans 2:18-20)

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- This concerned not only the instructors of the people, such as the scribes and Pharisees, at whom it prophetically pointed, but the hypocritical Israelites in general, who professed to know God, but by works denied Him
- St. Athanasius of Alexandria says, “But the heretic, though he use scriptural terms, yet as being equally dangerous and depraved, shall be asked in the words of the Spirit, ‘Why does thou preach My laws, and takes My covenant in thy mouth’? Thus, whereas the devil, though speaking from the Scriptures, is silenced by the Savior.”

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- He also says, “Praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner' For how is it possible for us to praise God with an impure mouth, since things which are contrary to each other cannot coexist? For what communion has righteousness with iniquity? Or, what fellowship is there between light and darkness? So exclaims Paul a minister of the Gospel (2 Cor 6:14).”
- *Seeing you hate instruction*, Their lives showed a hatred and disregard for the word of God, no matter what their words said
- How they lived spoke louder to God than what they said
- *cast My words behind you*, Threw them away hatefully out of sight and got rid of them

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- Contrast to David's behavior, *"For all His judgments were before me, And I did not put away His statutes from me."* (Psalm 18:22)
- Hatred and forgetfulness of the law of God lead at once to sins of deed, such as theft and adultery
- They had specifically broken many of God's commandments
- This was another way they displeased God
- *consented with him*, Literally, he delight in him, or had pleasure in him
- If they do not themselves actually rob, they give their consent

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- Those who associate themselves with covenant breakers fall under the same condemnation
- These teachers of the law were guilty both of theft and adultery, *“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?”* (Romans 2:21)
- They are called by our Lord an adulterous generation, Matthew 12:39; and they were so in a figurative one, adulterating the word of God, and handling it deceitfully

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- St. Basil the Great says, “According to this, fellowship of thought would entail sharing the sentiments of the one doing the work and taking pleasure in it with him... Let us fear, therefore, and obey the apostle when he says, " Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste" (1 Cor. 5:7)”

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- He now passes to sins by word, saying, from *your mouth*, as if from a spring, was poured forth all manner of profane language, lies, falsehoods, and deceits
- St. Augustine says, “Of the malevolence and deceit, brethren, of certain men he speaks, who by adulation, though they know what they hear to be evil, yet lest they offend those from whom they hear, not only by not reproving but by holding their peace do consent. Too little is it, that they do not say, Thou hast done evil: but they even say, Thou hast done even well: and they know it to be evil: but their mouth abounds in malice, and their tongue embraces deceit.”

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- Another sign that one despises God's word is the way that they use their tongue to speak of others
- Those sins by word, they were spoken not against a stranger, but against his own brethren, and it was done, not from a sudden impulse of anger, but deliberately. "Sitting," charges were made up, and *slander* spread against the brother, their *mothers' sons*
- *You sit*, Perhaps he means on the chair of Moses, or on the seat of judgment, in the great Sanhedrim of the nation
- St. Augustine says, "Therefore this weak one is called "mother's son," not yet father's, still needing milk, ... He is borne as yet in the bosom of his mother the Church, he is not strong enough to draw near to the solid food of his Father's table"

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- *You thought that I was altogether like you*, In some ways this was their greatest sin, losing sight of the holiness of God
- One way that they forgot God's holiness was in mistaking His patience and longsuffering for not caring about sin *these things you have done, and I kept silent*
- Because God did not intervene openly to punish the sins committed, the transgressor dared to imagine Him to be indifferent to sin, *I was altogether like you*
- God *kept silent*, bearing with him, unwilling to chastise him, in the hope of his confession and repentance

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- Many make the same mistake and confuse the generous space God gives for confession and repentance to mean that He does not really care about their sin
- But soon will come the day of judgment, when, as it is expressed in verse 3 of this Psalm, *God shall come, and shall not keep silent* as He here declares, *I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.*
- St. John Chrysostom says, “By silence here, he means longsuffering. You committed such awful crimes, He is saying, and I did not take vengeance; instead, I held my peace and bore it, giving you space for repentance.”

A Rebuke of their Disobedience to His Commands 50:16-21



- He continues and says, “ far from benefiting from this in any way, however, you ran headlong into worse evil. In fact, not only did you not change, or feel any shame, or admit your guilt for these actions: My long-suffering, My forbearance, My silence, My tolerance of such awful deeds you put down not to My longsuffering and lovingkindness but to unwillingness to correct this behavior and a lack of resentment of these doings.”
- They had misjudged God’s graciousness and forgotten His holiness
- In His love, God would not allow that to continue among His people; He would *set them in order before your eyes*

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- Having been rebuked, the wicked are now exhorted and warned
- In conclusion, he addresses the formal worshippers who 'forget God' by ignoring the spiritual aspect of the worship which He desires, as well as to the hypocrites whose conduct proves that they refuse to have Him in their knowledge
- *consider this*, Take it to heart, reflect upon it, let it sink deeply into your minds and consciences, and act upon it
- Graciously, God offered those who *forget* that He is a just and Almighty Judge an opportunity to *consider* and change their thinking and their ways before He comes to them in the judgment described in the first few verses of this Psalm

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- Lest His patience be turned into fury, and proceed to take vengeance on them
- If God should *tear* them *in pieces*, as a lion might tear apart its prey, there would *be none to deliver* them; none to save them
- Their situation would be hopeless
- *Whoever offers praise glorifies Me* The first part of this verse sums up the teaching of verses. 7-15 on the nature of true worship
- And the second part sums up the teaching of verses. 16-21 on the obligations of moral duty
- As the wicked have their final warning, so the godly have their last encouragement

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- Whosoever will offer God such sacrifice will be acceptable in His sight and God will feel honored by him
- Praise is the most acceptable sacrifice; true, hearty, gracious thanksgiving from a renewed mind
- Praise that proceeds from the altar of our hearts
- *Who orders his conduct aright*, This speaks to the aspect of forsaking the hypocrisy and wickedness and coming to God in confession and repentance
- He who lives so as to glorify God, and cause others to glorify Him

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- He who submits his whole way to divine guidance, and is careful to honor God in his life, brings an offering which the Lord accepts, will see *the salvation of God*
- This is a promise that the person who structures his/her life journey to receive God's salvation will, indeed, receive it
- God will bring him to peace and blessedness
- This blessing is promised to grateful hearts and holy lives
- And not only temporal salvation from time to time, but spiritual and eternal salvation

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- True and everlasting happiness which God have prepared for all His faithful servants, and for them only
- How does it happen that the essence of salvation is made to depend on the “Sacrifice of praise?”
- St. Augustine answers, “because nobody truly praises God, unless he be really pious. The impious may praise Him with their lips, but not by their lives; and thus their praise is idle, while their lives are in opposition to it.”

Conclusion With a Warning and Promise 50:22-23



- St. John Chrysostom says, “Sacrifice of praise will glorify Me.’ Now, what He means is this: Not only will it bring My anger to an end, and even annul the condemnation, but also glorify Me. .. He promises to show God’s way, note, and the real salvation of God for those who live virtuously. Accordingly; let us trust in His promise and glorify Him through an upright life and sacrifice of praise. This, after all, is the way that leads to salvation.”



Discussion

- What announcement introduces the theme of the Psalm?
- What motivated the Lord to appear at His temple in Zion?
- What names and titles for God does this Psalm include?
- What are the heavens and earth summoned by God to testify?
- What words of correction does the Lord give to His people?



Discussion

- In addition to sacrifices, what did the Lord desire from His people?
- In what way were the Israelites obeying the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit of the law?
- What kind of relationship does God want us to have with Him?
- What accusations does God make against the wicked?



Discussion

- How did the wicked misinterpret God's silence?
- How does God view hypocrisy?
- According to this Psalm, how can we honor God?
- What promises can we claim from this Psalm?