



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 54

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *“To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, “Is David not hiding with us?”*
- This is one of the few Psalms with a specific musical direction, *With stringed instruments*
- It is also called *A Contemplation*
- According to the title the author is David
- The title also includes the occasion on which the Psalm was composed
- It refers to the time of David’s persecution by Saul



Introduction

- There were actually two times when the Ziphites betrayed David unto King Saul, first in 1 Samuel 23 and the second in 1 Samuel 26
- David escaped both times, but the circumstances of this Psalm seem to best fit the circumstances of 1 Samuel 23, when David learned of the Ziphite betrayal (1 Samuel 23:26-29)
- This Psalm is supposed to have been written after this deliverance, the first one
- These Ziphites were the inhabitants of a city called Ziph, which was in the tribe of Judah, Joshua 15:55



Introduction

- David having taken refuge in the mountains of that city
- This Psalm constitutes a cry of an oppressed people and expresses their trust in the complete deliverance of God
- Some believe that the Speaker here is Christ, the Lord of glory, the Son of David who suffers for our sake and *Ziphites* represent Judas
- This Psalm is included in the prayer of the sixth hour of the Book of Agpeya where we commemorate the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ
- By praying it, the church glorifies Christ and His suffering on the cross; this is why it is a proper Psalm for Good Friday



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3
- An Expression of Confident Belief in God Deliverance 54:4-5
- A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- The Psalm begins with a four-fold plea *save me...hear [me]...give ear [to me]... vindicate me*
- Each of these pleas quite literally command God's attention, response, and action
- David sought the Lord's deliverance and vindication and did not take his own revenge
- In his distress, David relied on both the *name* and the *strength* of God
- God's name is the manifestation of His character, the sum of His revealed attributes

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- The psalmist can appeal to it, for He has declared that it is His will to save those who put their trust in Him, “*Let those who love Your name be joyful in You.*” Psalm 5:11
- *strength* speaks of His great power
- David knew that God’s *strength* could respond to his need by what he knew of God’s *name*
- It is obvious here that the divine name refers to the “divine presence”, and the trust of the divine work; and not just to a name uttered by the lips

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- When the wicked said to the Lord Christ, *“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?”* And then I will declare to them, *‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*“(Matthew 7:22-23)
- While the Ziphites sought to please Saul; David took refuge in the name of God, trusted everything to Him, being the Mighty One, and the Judge of all
- *vindicate me*, Confident in the goodness of his cause, he is sure that if right is done him, he will be delivered, 1 Samuel 24:15; Psalm 7:8,9:4,26:1,35:24,43:1

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- His enemies would have greater evidence that David was in the right and they were in the wrong when God answered this prayer, *vindicate* him, and preserved him
- According to St. Augustine, the church is like David
- While the Ziphites practice deception, and plan plots, the persecuted church finds in the name of her crucified Christ and in the power of His cross, her salvation
- He asked God to hear his prayers, the prayer of the heart and the unspoked prayer and to *Give ear to the words of my mouth*, the spoken words
- David's prayer was remarkably heard and answered

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- For when Saul came down upon the first discovery, and beset David and his men all around, just as he was about to seize him, news came to him of the invasion of the Philistines; which obliged him directly to quit his pursuit of David, and return in haste for the defense of his country, 1 Samuel 23:26
- And upon the second discovery, when Saul came again to take him, Saul was delivered into the hands of David, who could have took away his life if he would; but *David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away* as a proof of his being in his power, 1 Samuel 26:12

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- Of such benefit is the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man
- This prayer is suitable to David's antitype, the Messiah; Psalm 69:1
- It was common for David and others in their prayers to merely ask for God to *hear* or *give ear* to their cry
- If the good and merciful God heard, He would act
- But what case does David have against these Ziphites?
- What is his justification for asking that God would put an end to their plans?

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- David points out that these men – who were *Israelites*, and from the tribe of *Judah* – were acting like *strangers*
- Why else would they be seeking to destroy the one whom the Lord had already anointed king and who was just waiting until Saul would step aside until he could assume the crown?
- Their betrayal of David was so contrary to both David and God's cause that David could rightly refer to them as *strangers*, as *oppressors* who *sought* David's *life*
- These Ziphites were *violent* men, *oppressors*
- They were heartless and sought David's soul; they were after his life

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- Their problems were not only in relation to David, but also in relation to God
- Their rejection of David was just another way that they rejected God
- They had no more regard for right and justice than if they knew no God, or cared for none
- This is the root cause of all betrayal, it is that people do not have a right relationship with the Lord
- They do not set God before their eyes and where that is the case – where people have no regard for the Lord, they are not going to regard his people, either

An Earnest Prayer for Deliverance, 54:1-3



- The Lord Christ *“came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.”* (John 1:11)
- And He, Himself says, *“A man’s enemies will be those of his own household”* (Matthew 10:36)
- St. Augustine comments and says, *“When man does not set God before him, what would be before his eyes other than the world? In other words, he would collect wealth above wealth; cares to fill up his storehouses; and would say, ‘And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’”* (Luke 12:19)

An Expression of Confident Belief in God Deliverance 54:4-5



- *Selah* in verse 3 is a time to reflect on God
- After this brief pause, which here marks a change of his feelings, David's confidence has been restored, and he has faith that his prayer will be answered
- Confident of his prayer having been heard, the Psalmist breaks out into a joyous expression of thankfulness
- *Behold, God is my helper*, as if he is warning his enemies
- His present adversity had not led him to question the goodness of God, but to appeal to it

An Expression of Confident Belief in God Deliverance 54:4-5



- David can say, by his past experience, not only that God will help him, but that God is on his side, so that the issue cannot be doubtful
- What is here said is true of David's Son, the Messiah, and is expressed by Him in much the same language, "*Surely the Lord God will help Me; Who is he who condemn Me? Indeed, they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.*", (Isaiah 50:9)
- And it is true of all the believers whom the Lord helps
- *He will repay my enemies*, Literally, He shall return the evil upon his enemies and opponents

An Expression of Confident Belief in God Deliverance 54:4-5



- God will cause the evil which they are planning to fall back upon their own heads
- David prophesies their destruction
- God would reward them for their evil deeds, He would deal with them as they deserved; this is not a personal desire, but David believes that the Lord will do justice
- *Cut them off in Your truth*, David came to prayer again
- This is simply an expression of strong confidence, that God would deal with them as they deserved

An Expression of Confident Belief in God Deliverance 54:4-5



- He prayed, *Cut them off in Your truth* but refused to take vengeance in his own hands
- Immediately after the second betrayal of the Ziphites (1 Samuel 26:1) David had the opportunity to kill King Saul in his sleep and he refused to do it; he waited upon God to do it

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- Confidence has now rose to certainty
- The Hebrew word interpreted *freely*, mean with willingness
- With a free will he will sacrifice unto God
- It was a *sacrifice* that didn't *need* to be made; it was done *freely* out of gratitude
- *I will praise Your name*, Which explains what is meant by sacrificing; this is what is due to the Lord
- David said this in anticipation of God's salvation, but not in a demand for the rescue

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- He was able to *praise* God while the problem remained and before the prayer was answered
- God's name is good, and so is His praise
- It is of great benefit to our souls to be always in praise
- David described his enemies in verse 3 as not setting God before them
- He here declares that he is of a different mind from them
- He determined to have the Lord in continuous and constant remembrance in his sacrifices and praises

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- Then David gives thanks to God the Father for the accomplishment of all these acts
- He confidently brought his request to God, knowing that many times before God had *delivered* him
- Here, the psalmist speak with confident through his past experience of God as His Savior from every affliction
- He has seen, as well, the failure of the devil, despite all his endeavor to destroy the children of God
- It is, therefore, not gladness on his part to destroy someone, as much as it is rather to destroy the spiritual hosts of darkness

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- God's past faithfulness became the ground for future faith
- David lived a life of dangers, yet he was always safe
- In the retrospect of his very many deliverances he feels that he must praise God, and looking upon the mercy which he sought as though it were already received, he sang this song over it
- *And my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies*, It is not that he delighted in the destruction of his enemies, but in the justice of God glorified thereby, and in the goodness of God to him, in delivering him from them, *“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles, for God has avenged you on her!”* (Revelation 18:20)

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- This may perhaps point at Christ, of whom David was a type
- Jesus was the anointed King yet to come into the fullness of His kingdom
- He came to save and lead God's people, and when He did, some among God's people betrayed Him unto death
- God would deliver Him out of all the troubles of His state of humiliation, and He was perfectly sure of it; and all things are said to be put under His feet
- For, though we do not see yet all things put under Him, yet we are sure He shall reign till all His enemies be made His footstool, and He shall see His desire upon them

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- It is an encouragement to all believers too to profit of their deliverances, as St. Paul does (like David here), 2 Timothy 4:17-18, *“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”*

A Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving 54:6-7



- St. Augustine says, “This do ye therefore, brethren, with your souls; lift up your hearts, sharpen the edge of your mind, learn truly to love God, learn to despise the present world, learn voluntarily to sacrifice the offerings of praise; to the end that, mounting beyond the flower of the grass, ye may look back upon your enemies.”

Discussion



- What was going on in David's life when he wrote this Psalm?
- To which of God's attributes did David appeal in this prayer?
- What case did the psalmist make against his enemies?
- How did David describe the spiritual state of his adversaries?
- How did David deal with his fears?



Discussion

- What expectations did David have of the Lord's deliverance?
- What vow did David make to the Lord?
- How did David plan to respond to God's deliverance?
- Why was David motivated to praise the Lord?
- What statement of confidence concludes this Psalm?