



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 55

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# Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Contemplation of David*
- The Psalm describes a time of some kind of rebellion against David, and a key leader in the struggle was a trusted friend who betrayed David
- The occasion of this Psalm, according to most scholars, the rebellion of Absalom, (2 Samuel 15-18), and the betrayal of Ahithophel
- Ahithophel is considered by many scholars as a type of Judas, the betrayer of our Lord; and, indeed, there are many things in this Psalm, if not the whole, which may be truly applied to Christ



# Introduction

- Some think it was written when David understood that the inhabitants of Keilah would deliver him into the hands of Saul, 1 Samuel 23:12
- Others believe that Jeremiah was the author, and that the disloyal friend was Pashhur, by whom Jeremiah was tormented for predicting the destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 20)
- However, all the circumstances in the Psalm agree with David's condition at that time, and the occasion was one in which the persecuted and much-afflicted king would be likely to pour out the desires of his heart before God



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

The Psalm falls into three nearly equal divisions; in the first, despair 1-8, in the second, anger 9-15, in the third, trust 16-21

- A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3
- A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8
- Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14
- Asking God to Take Vengeance 55:15
- David's Confidence in God 55:16-21
- A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23

# A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3



- This is the language of earnestness
- The psalmist was in deep affliction, and he pleaded, therefore, that God would not turn away from him in his troubles
- We sense in David's prayer that he felt God was distant, as if He were hiding from him
- *do not hide Yourself*, As the unmerciful man turns away from hardship and suffering
- It seems that David feels abandoned by God
- As if He unconcerned and not regarding it, nor seeming to take any notice of it, or as displeased, angry at him

# A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3



- In that dread hour when Jesus bore our sins upon the cross, He cried out saying, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46) as if His Father did hide Himself
- David asked God to *attend to me, and hear me*
- A very special need is indicated by these four petitions to be heard in verses 1 and 2
- David believed he could face almost anything with the strong sense of God’s presence and pleasure
- First, David describes the emotional and mental distress he is feeling, *I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily*

# A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3



- He is so impatient, *I am restless*
- *In my complaint*, It is not used to denote complaint in the sense of fault-finding, but in the sense of deep distress
- *Moan*, Seems not to be to mourn, but to inquire earnestly; to seek; to look for, as one who looks every way for help
- The psalmist did not hesitate to give vent to his feelings by *moan noisily*, groans, or weeps, or prayers
- David turned first to God
- He took his pain to God and made his requests known to Him, rather than complain about and blame God for what has happened

# A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3



- St. Athanasius believes that this is the cry of the suffering Lord Christ, who came to the cross to save mankind
- In verses 1 and 2 David just calls out to God noting that there is a problem
- But in verse 3 now he goes on to identify more specifically the problem and really identifying the results of being betrayed
- And those results include being spoken poorly of – *the voice of the enemy*
- The results include oppression by these wicked men



# A Prayer that God Would Hear his Cry 55:1-3



- They include these men bringing all sorts of trouble and hateful anger into David's life
- He had been, and was, unjustly treated by others
- *the voice of the enemy*, The enemy was vocal; their uproars, threats, and slanders; they accused him falsely of many crimes
- *the voice of the enemy*, Perhaps of Absalom, or of Ahithophel, who gave out he would *strike only the king*, 2 Samuel 17:2
- And of any spiritual enemy, as sin, Satan, and the world, when they threaten dominion and oppression
- And of the Scribes and Pharisees reproaching Christ

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- In verse 3 David focuses on the action of *his enemies*
- *They speak; They oppress; They cast iniquity; They hate*
- But now in verses 4 and 5 David's focus is on his own response to these realities
- The attacks of his enemies deeply grieve and pain the heart of the psalmist
- David mentions his heart being in anguish as a woman in labor
- This was true of Christ in the garden, when His soul was exceeding sorrowful unto death, and he was in pain, and also on the cross

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- David is terrified, he is full of fear, and he's overwhelmed by terror
- *the terrors of death have fallen upon me*, Thus it was with the human nature of Christ, when He desired, if possible, the cup might pass from Him
- When a king is the object of a conspiracy, he well knows that nothing, but his death will satisfy the conspirators
- The stress of this crisis did cause David mental anguish, increased by the real danger of death
- All this made David tremble in fear and feel that *horror has overwhelmed me*

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- His fear was so great as to make him tremble
- He did not know what would happen next, or how soon the worst should come
- It is not as if they were foreigners, whose hostility was to be expected
- They are his own countrymen; one of them is his own familiar friend; yet they threaten his life
- The horrors that David is facing are so terrible, how he would make his escape

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- He was so surrounded with enemies that he did not see how he could escape but upon the wing and therefore, he wishes to, *Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest*
- The dove may be meant as a symbol of his own innocence while his enemies were like the hungry hawk
- The dove also, symbolizes the Holy Spirit
- *be at rest*, Safe and secure from the conspirators
- And literally, "dwell," which means permanently

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- St. Gregory of Nyssa comments and says, “So will he who avoid every bitterness and every lust of the body, to fly high with the wings of the dove (the Spirit) above all the conflicts of the world, and discover what, alone, could be worthy to be desired. He, himself, would become beautiful, by getting close to the divine beauty ; namely to God; becoming enlightened, through having the fellowship with the true Light.”
- David wished he could just escape this terror-filled situation and *remain in the wilderness*
- He longed for the simpler days when he repeatedly saw God’s faithfulness *in the wilderness*

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- Fleeing away from his enemies, David actually went to dwell in the wilderness, beyond the land (2 Samuel 17:22-23)
- So, gracious souls desire to be secluded as in a wilderness, clear of the company of wicked men, as Jeremiah wished for, Jeremiah 9:2
- Some apply this to the state of the early church under Jewish persecution, when it fled from Judea, and settled in the wilderness of the Gentiles

# A Description of his Trouble and Sorrows 55:4-8



- As doves fly from storm to their nests in the rocks, so the psalmist would haste away from the passions and dangers of the city to some safe refuge in *the wilderness*
- David declares that he would not waste a moment but *escape* at once, for fear he might be too late, and because he could not bear the uproar and disturbance of his enemies any longer
- *storm and tempest*, Signifying a powerful army of enemies invading a country





# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- With a sudden transition, David passes from his own suffering, fears, and longings, to pray for the confusion of his enemies' counsels, and to describe the miserable condition of the city
- David calls upon the Lord to act, for the ways of his enemies are extremely wicked
- The word *destroy* originally came as (devour)
- Absalom intended to devour his father, supported by Ahitophel, David's friend and counselor
- By doing such horrible betrayal of friendship and fatherhood, they made themselves worthy of being devoured; for "*Whatever a man sows, that he will reap*" (Galatians 6:7)



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- *Destroy, O Lord, Or* swallow up as Pharaoh and his host were swallowed up in the Red sea, or as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, were swallowed up in the earth
- So, all the enemies of Christ and His church will be destroyed; and death, the last of them, will be swallowed up in victory, Isaiah 25:8
- *divide their tongues*, Contains a reference to the confusion of tongues at Babel (Genesis 11:7)
- He wishes that confusion and division such as overtook the builders of Babel may overtake them and break up their union



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- The prayer of David was heard, 2 Samuel 17:1-23
- Hushai and Ahithophel gave opposite counsel to Absalom; and Absalom followed the advice of Hushai
- Ahithophel, knowing that such advice would destroy Absalom, went out and hanged himself (2 Samuel 15-17)
- Both King David of Israel and the Son of David, Jesus Christ, were betrayed by a close friend, who as a consequence of his deeds went out and hanged himself
- It is difficult not to see a type of Judas Iscariot in this



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- As he looks at the city of Jerusalem, that is under their control, all he sees is trouble and wickedness, oppression and deceit
- The city is falling into ruin and misery through the misdeeds of his enemies
- It is now possessed by Absalom, by whom *violence* was done to David's wives, through the advice of Ahithophel; and *strife*, contention, and rebellion, were arouse among the people
- The Lord Christ saw iniquity and strife in the city of Jerusalem, when they unjustly delivered Him to trial



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- Strife occurred among them, because some said that He could not be from God, with a false claim that He broke the Sabbath; while others said that no sinner could perform such great miracles as Jesus did
- People walked the city *day and night* continually causing trouble for David
- The word *they* might refer to the violence and strife mentioned in the preceding verse
- They are here personified, and they seem to surround the city
- They are like a surrounding sieging army and the city was full of wickedness within and without



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- It is not only that wickedness prevails, but throughout the city there is violence and contention
- This whole account shows numerous of sin in Jerusalem at this time, and that it was openly and publicly committed
- The crisis at hand was not merely a problem for David, but for God's people in general
- Jesus also wept over Jerusalem, "*He saw the city and wept over it.*" (Luke 19:41), and who said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!*" (Luke 13:34)



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- The psalmist passes from the general to the particular - from the great number of his opponents to one special individual
- Ahithophel was known as "*David's counsellor*" (2 Samuel 15:12)
- What he counselled was considered as a sort of "*oracle of God*" (2 Samuel 16:23)
- David says that if it were only his enemies who were offending him, he could bear it
- He could hide from them physically and perhaps also emotionally
- He could conceal his weakness and hide the hurt
- But that is not the case; the one tormenting him is a close companion and a familiar friend



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- Reproach from an enemy is to be expected, and may be patiently endured
- *my equal*, Not in power and dignity, which could not be, but in reputation for his deep wisdom and the great influence which he had upon him
- One whom he honored and valued as himself
- A man, from whom humanity, kindness, and tenderness might have been expected
- *my acquaintance*, One well known to him, as Ahithophel was to David, and Judas to Christ





# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- He trusted him, but he found him thus shamefully unfaithful
- David shared all his thoughts and plans with Ahithophel
- Their fellowship had been tender and confidential
- The traitor had been treated lovingly and trusted much
- *walked to the house of God in the throng* The betrayer is another person who is a disciple of God
- The same way, the Lord Christ chose Judas as one of His disciples, a friend, ate together with Him and He even entrusted him with the treasury box; yet after all that, he sold His Master for thirty pieces of silver



# Sources of his Trouble 55:9-14

- In a letter he sent to Paulinus, bishop of Dola, St. Jerome referred to this passage; he said, “Daniel,...Do not think of me as a better person, on account of that I came under the banner of Christ, few years before you did. As Paul, the chosen vessel changed from a violent persecutor, and then the last of the apostolic system, to become the first; although being the last, yet “he labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Corinthians 15: 10). And Judas, to whom the Lord said: “You were my equal and My companion; We walked to the house of God in the throng” ); , has betrayed Him”

# Asking God to Take Vengeance

## 55:15



- The psalmist calls on God to bring destruction upon the whole crowd of his enemies
- This remarkably strong statement from David shows how dangerous the man was to the peace of God's people and how deeply he had wounded David
- It was a strong prayer, but it was a prayer that left vengeance to God, and David refused to take revenge himself
- The deaths of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23) and Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14-15), and of so many of Absalom's followers (2 Samuel 18:7-8), were quite a sufficient fulfilment

# Asking God to Take Vengeance

## 55:15



- This is also a prophecy about Judas, who “*went and hanged himself.*” (Matthew 27:5)
- The psalmist neither expected nor desired a literal fulfilment of his wish
- *For wickedness is in their dwellings*, David called upon God to bring such a severe judgment because the *wickedness* was so deeply ingrained in them
- Their inward part, the heart, is very wicked
- St. Augustine says, “I Hear of living men perishing and being swallowed up in a gulf of the earth, that is, being swallowed up in the longing of earthly desires.”

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- David turns altogether to God and suddenly switched from praying for destruction to declaring unmoved strong confidence in God
- It's a further indication that he was able to leave his crisis – and his enemies – in the hands of the LORD, who would *save* him
- David's confidence in God was rooted in sincere dependence on Him, demonstrated by constant prayer
- Together all this gave David the confidence in God to say, *He shall hear my voice*

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- *Evening and morning and at noon*, Might be a reference to stated hours of prayer (Daniel 6:10; Acts 10:9,30)
- In another Psalm the Psalmist says that he prays seven times, *“Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments.”* (Psalm 119:164)
- *and cry aloud*, The word means to make a humming sound; to sigh; to growl; to groan
- It means that he would give utterance to his deep feelings in appropriate tones - whether words, sighs, or groans
- It indicating the distress he was in, the intensity and power of his prayer

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- St. Augustine comments on verse 17 and says, “In evening,’ the Lord on the Cross; ‘in morning,’ in Resurrection; ‘at noon-day,’ in Ascension. I will recount in evening the patience of Him dying, I will tell forth in morning the life of Him rising, I will pray that He hearken at noon-day sitting at the right hand of the Father.”
- He continues and says, “He shall hearken to my voice, That intercede for us. How great is the security of this man. How great the consolation, how great the refuge ‘from weakness of mind and tempest,’ against evil men, against ungodly men both without and within, and in the case of those that are without though they had been within.”

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- David felt that his *soul* had been rescued (bought out, *redeemed*) from turmoil and crisis and into *peace*
- God had preserved his life and delivered him safe and sound from many battles which were fought against him and had given him peace and rest from all his enemies before the present trouble came upon him, 2 Samuel 7:1
- Wherefore he believed, that He who had delivered him in time past would deliver him again; this is the reasoning of faith, 2 Corinthians 1:9
- He sees that there are many *against* him; but his courage does not fail



# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- David was confident that the eternal God would answer His prayer and bring upon them deserved judgments
- *Even He who abides from of old*, The eternal unchanging God; He who is from everlasting
- The same God who has heard prayer, will hear it now; He who has always shown Himself a just God and a vindicator, will show Himself the same now
- The fact that God is everlasting unchanging, is the only foundation for our security at any time
- Who could have confidence in a changeable God?

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- *Selah*, Here it marks probably a pause for worship of the great and eternal King enthroned in all His glory
- *Because they do not change*, In the sense of change of mind, repentance
- They have no changes in their hearts, nor in their lives, but continue in their natural and sinful estate
- God will humble these men who do not fear Him, Psalm 10:4-6, 73:4
- The truth is a general one, but the Psalmist is thinking particularly of his own enemies

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- St. Augustine says, “To them is no changing, because they are not changed for the better, but for the worse: neither while they are here, nor in the resurrection. For all we shall rise again, but not all shall be changed. Wherefore? Because ‘To them is no changing: and they have not feared God.’”

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- Once more the psalmist returns to the betrayal of his friend
- Ahithophel destroyed peaceful relationships and violated agreements with others
- *He has broken his covenant*, All those obligations, *covenant* of friendship with David by which he was tied to David, both as his king and as his friend
- It may refer also to the Jews who rejected the Savior who offered them a new covenant
- They rejected the new covenant and despised the prophecies
- Or Judas who betrayed the covenant with his Lord

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- Using repetition and strong images, David showed how dishonorable his enemy was
- He was a hypocrite pretending to be a friend
- But his friendship was false; he only used pleasant words - words expressive of friendship and love - to deceive and betray
- Such were the words of Ahithophel, when in counsel with David; and such the words of Judas, when he said to Christ, "*Greetings, Rabbi, and kissed Him.*" (Matthew 26:49)
- David points out that this person's words seemed to be flattering, righteous, and innocent, but they really were not

# David's Confidence in God

## 55:16-21



- The speech is as *smooth* as *butter* but the heart was intent on war
- The words seemed to be as soft as oil but behind the words were drawn sword ready to wound
- It is imperative that we realize the damage that the tongue can cause
- As St. James said, “*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*” (James 3:6)

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- David concludes by reminding himself and teaching others to place their burdens on God during these troublesome times
- God will carry both him and this load
- The burden might be here the burden of afflictions, which is sometimes very heavy
- Some are heavier in their own kind and nature than others, and become so through their range and diversity, as in the case of Job
- Or through their continuation for long time, and especially when one feels that God is hiding, or with the temptations of Satan
- Or else the burden of sin which is a heavy burden, under which the believers groan

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- God can sustain him through a turbulent time as this and will never allow *the righteous to be moved*
- He does not say that the Lord shall remove the burden from him, or shall carry it instead of him, but says *He shall sustain you*
- Meaning that He shall give him the possibility to endure with joy
- God will get him through it
- St. Isaac the Syrian says, “If you believe that God can sustain you, why then would you worry about the temporary things, and the needs of the body?...‘Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you’”



# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- David had hope and confidence because he was persuaded that his fate did not rest in the hands of unfaithful men
- God was still Lord over all, and God had the final word on whether the righteous would *be moved* or not
- Though the righteous people may be in distress for awhile, there will be an end to their suffering
- While a man is righteous, trusts in and depends upon God, he will never suffer him to be shaken; he is safe
- The faithful God would not only help and establish the righteous, He would also *bring down* those *bloodthirsty and deceitful men* who caused so much trouble among God's people

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- While God sustains and supports the righteous, He *brings down* and crushes the ungodly
- *shall bring them down*, Ahithophel and his partners in the conspiracy against David, Judas and the wicked Jews involved in Christ's death
- It is as though the psalmist, having sought from God for himself two wings of a dove to fly up to the bosom of the Father, sees the *bloodthirsty* and the *deceitful* brought down to *the pit of destruction*; losing both their temporal and their eternal life

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- The Psalm appropriately ended with David's focus upon God, not his enemies
- He would *trust* in Him and not be disappointed, there is no better ground of confidence
- St. Augustine says, "The pit of corruption is the darkness of sinking under. When blind leads blind, they both fall into a ditch. God brings them down into the pit of corruption, not because He is the author of their own guilt, but because He is Himself the judge of their iniquities. 'For God has delivered them unto the desires of their heart.' For they have loved darkness, and not light; they have loved blindness, and not seeing."

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- Verse 23 states the fact that wicked men, especially covenant breakers, shall finally suffer eternal condemnation, as Christ made abundantly clear in Matthew 25
- The fathers in general apply the principal passages of this Psalm to our Lord's sufferings, the betrayal of Judas, and the wickedness of the Jews
- Jesus was betrayed by a close friend, Judas who and the other apostles were with Jesus for more than three years

# A General Exhortation to Trust in God 55:22-23



- There were many times when Jesus was alone with his apostles, sharing with them the intimate details concerning the kingdom of God
- Jesus has gone through the pain of betrayal
- He knows our pain and wants us to cast our burden on Him, *“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”* (Hebrews 2:18)



# Discussion

- What initial appeal to the Lord introduces this Psalm?
- What danger did David face?
- How did he describe his heart's pain?
- What did David wish he could do?
- Who are David's enemies?



# Discussion

- What did David do when he realized he could not escape his problem?
- What prayer did David present to the Lord?
- How did David deal with his pain and anger?
- What can we learn from David's four responses to fear?