



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 63

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# Introduction

- The title of this psalm is, *A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah*
- The theme of this psalm is that the ultimate good, and utmost blessing is the possession of God
- According to the title this psalm was composed by David
- Most commentators believe it to belong either to David's wilderness years before he came to the throne of Israel, when he was persecuted by Saul, and obliged to hide himself in desert places, as in the forest of Hareth, the wildernesses of Ziph, Maon, and Engedi, 1 Samuel 22:5 all which were in the tribe of Judah, Joshua 15:55



# Introduction

- Or, when his son Absalom rebelled against him, which obliged him to flee from Jerusalem to the wilderness, 2 Samuel 15:23
- In either case, David was in exile
- In this Psalm David reveals his longing for God; as well as prophesies the perdition of Saul and there is also a prophecy about the captivity in Babylon
- As David was in the wilderness; so, the Messiah, David's Son, was in a wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan, and where He was hungry and thirsty in a literal sense, as David was here in a spiritual sense, as the Psalm shows, Matthew 4:1





# Introduction

- This Psalm was adopted by the early Church as its morning Psalm
- It is one of the Prime prayer Psalms in the Agepya and it is also included in the 6<sup>th</sup> hour prayer where we commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus and His saying, “I thirst!” (John 19:28)
- “The Fathers of the Church,” says St. Chrysostom, “appointed it to be said every morning, as a spiritual song and a medicine to blot out our sins; to kindle in us a desire of God; to raise our souls, and inflame them with a mighty fire of devotion; to make us overflow with goodness and love, and send us with such preparation to approach and appear before God.”



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- David's Soul Thirsts After God 63:1-2
- The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6
- Thankful Confidence in God 63:7-8
- Trust Despite the Trouble 63:9-11

# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- David begins by describing his longing and desire for the things of God
- He is earnestly seeking after God whom he knows to be his own
- The repetition of the name of God, and the claiming Him for the Psalmist's very own, denotes, observes St. Chrysostom, deep love and eager pressing towards God, to the neglect of all earthly things
- He will not wait; he is up *Early* to meet his God
- The word *early* has not only the sense of early in the morning, but that of eagerness, readiness, and willingness



# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- St. Augustine says, “There is a sleep of the soul, there is a sleep of the body. Sleep of the body we all ought to have; but of this let us take heed, that our soul sleep not, for evil is the sleep of the soul. Good is the sleep of the body, whereby is recruited the health of the body; but the sleep of the soul is to forget her GOD. Therefore, the Apostle says, ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ (Eph.5:14). Was the Apostle waking up one sleeping in body? Nay, but he was waking a soul sleeping, in order that she might be enlightened by Christ.”

# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- One ought to sleep, free from all temporal anxiety, wake to the contemplation of God
- David uses his physical environment to describe the spiritual condition
- He does not describe his physical needs, but uses his physical needs to represent his spiritual need for God
- It is the cry of David, cut off in exile from the public rites and worship when he was hiding in the wilderness
- It is the 'water of life' for which he thirsts; the spiritual refreshment with which God revives the weak soul



# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- *My flesh longs for You*, Is expressive of the same thing in different words denoting that he most earnestly desired, with his whole self, his heart, soul, and strength, that he might enjoy the presence of God
- The Wilderness of Judah is largely desert, so this was a picture of longing that came easily to David's mind
- The opening verse reminds us that we are to be an active participant in our relationship with God
- This is not simply an intellectual pursuit; it is a deep abiding spiritual need

# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- Our need for communion with God is compared here with our absolute need for life-sustaining water
- God's presence is as life-sustaining as water and food
- Because of these opening words, this Psalm has been set apart from the early Church for morning use
- Its daily recitation is urged by St. Athanasius and St. Chrysostom
- *So I have looked for You in the sanctuary*, David longingly reflects back upon the time when he is able to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and worship Him
- He thinks back upon seeing the glory and power of God

# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- David longs to be brought out of this wilderness that he might have access to the sanctuary to see the glorious power of God
- The reference here is to what was manifested of the presence and the power of God in the services of public worship; the praises, the prayers, the rejoicings
- David calls to mind former experiences in the sanctuary; and these stimulate him to an eager desire of fresh tastes of the grace of God, and clearer views of His power and glory
- St. Augustine says, “Unless a man first thirst in that desert, that is in the evil wherein he is, he never arrives at the good, which is God.”



# David's Soul Thirsts After God

## 63:1-2



- The Ark was the symbol of God's Presence, of His strength and glory (1 Samuel 4:21; Psalm 24:7, Psalm 78:61; Psalm 132:8)
- The word *see* here, means to experience and enjoy God's power and glory (Psalm 27:13,34:8,12; Matthew 5:8; John 3:36)
- According to St. Augustine, "as the believer's soul longs for God, he goes to the house of the Lord, and appears before Him, to enjoy seeing His power and glory. Or, as said by the apostle, *"After you have known God, or rather are known by God"* (Galatians 4:9). While feeling thirsty to know Him, we will discover that it is God's pleasure for us to be known by Him."

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- This is the reason why David was so motivated to pursue God
- He has waited to see God's power and glory, yet after all it is the lovingkindness of which he has personal experience that sets his lips to praise
- The *lovingkindness* of God was *better*, more meaningful to David, than *life* itself and was more precious than his own life
- David enjoyed God's great love and valued it because life without the love of God is nothing else than death
- All the enjoyments of life are nothing without the love of God

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- *“Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, Than great treasure with trouble.”* (Proverbs 15:16)
- According to St. Athanasius, he who approaches Christ will rather have His mercy and praise, than to have the longevity of life
- A man that has no share in the love of God is dead while he lives
- In light of David's experience of God's great love, he determined to vocally praise God
- God's ways are a reason to praise and bless God's name



# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- St. Augustine says, “My lips would not praise You, unless before me were to go Your mercy. By Your gift I praise, through Your mercy Thee I praise. For I should not be able to praise God, unless He gave me to be able to praise Him.”
- This Psalm speaks of praise and devotion given to God in gratitude, out of a rich sense of being blessed
- David describes the depth of satisfaction that can be found in the Lord in verses 4-5
- *Thus I will bless You while I live, As he has once given praise to God in His Sanctuary, so will he give it all his days*

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- His faith is now so intense that he can pray and praise, just as if he were in the House of God
- Not only by constant praise and thanksgiving, but he will so live that his conversation shall be a blessing of God's Name, because he will conduct his whole life to the honor, praise, and glory of His Name
- *I will lift up my hands* The outward symbol of an uplifted heart, as Moses did during the battle with Amalek, (Exodus 17:11)
- And as St. Paul directs his disciple Timothy, *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."* (1 Timothy 2:8)

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- The lifting of the hands is the posture of prayer, and it is appropriate for praise
- It displays the anticipation of gratefully receiving from God, and the sense of surrender to Him
- St. Augustine says, “Lift up therefore hands in prayer. Our Lord has lifted up for us His hands on the Cross”
- *In Your name*, According to His command, with confidence in His name
- *My soul shall be satisfied*, God feeds the hungry soul with rich and bountiful food



# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- The worship, praising, and singing to the Lord is described as deep satisfaction to David
- *with marrow and fatness*, Denote rich food; and the comparison is between the pleasure of serving God, and the satisfaction derived from food when one is hungry
- It is not uncommon to compare the pleasures of serving God with a feast or banquet, Isaiah 25:6
- It is true of that Heavenly Banquet of the Eucharist, wherein the Church makes her glad offering to God
- *And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips*, More joy and more praise

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- David's mouth is full of mercy, therefore, his mouth is also full of thanksgiving
- St. Jerome says, "The words "marrow" and "fatness" refer to (richness). The soul that feeds on good things, shall be satisfied with the riches of virtues. On the contrary, the soul that feeds on evil, is full of the riches of iniquities."
- When once David calls God to mind as he lies down to rest, he is so occupied with the thought of His love that he meditates on it all night long

# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- The night was divided into three watches by the Jews and the division into four watches referred to in the New Testament was of Roman origin
- David thought upon God's greatness and goodness during the day and during the *night watches meditate* upon Him too
- If at dawn he opens up his eyes on praising God, proclaiming the longing of both his body and soul for Him; he will remain all day long preoccupied with Him until he goes to bed at night
- A magnificent portrait of the thirst for God day and night



# The Greatness of God's Love Stirs Praise 63:3-6



- According to St. Augustine, the word *bed* here refers to rest and comfort
- If we remember God in the time of our troubles, it would be befitting of us as well to remember Him when we enjoy rest and comfort
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Nothing is better than the storehouse which receives such prayers as these. Listen to the psalmist says: ‘When I remember you on my bed, I meditate in you in the early morning’”

# Thankful Confidence in God

## 63:7-8



- Many of David's Psalms are simple cries for help
- Since this Psalm was composed from the Wilderness of Judah, there was certainly help David could ask for
- Yet, Psalm 63 has no cry for help but gives thanks and praise for God's faithfulness in many times when God had *been my help* for David
- God had already delivered David out of so many dangers and troubles, that he felt so confident for the future
- In spite being on the run attacked by many enemies David was able to rejoice, *in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice*

# Thankful Confidence in God

## 63:7-8



- The idea of the shelter of *shadow* of God's wings is repeated many times in the Psalms
- Sometimes it has the idea of protection, as a mother bird shelters her young chicks
- Other times it has the idea of presence, as in the wings of the cherubim that surround the throne of God
- Here St. Augustine beautifully observes, that we are the chickens under the hen's wings, but whereas the young of a hen do not need her protection when they are full grown, we, the more we are grown, more need the shadow of Christ's wings



# Thankful Confidence in God

## 63:7-8



- St. Augustine says, “Let no one say, let Him protect me while I am a little one: as if sometime he would attain to such magnitude, as should be self-sufficient ... Always by Him let us desire to be protected: then always in Him we shall have power to be great.”
- *My soul follows close behind You*, This speaks of the partnership and connection the believer experiences with God
- David’s *soul* was close to God, following Him as one followed a Master or Teacher
- God responded with care and strength for David, upholding him with His mighty *right hand*

# Thankful Confidence in God

## 63:7-8



- David's *soul follows*, as it is written, "*Draw me away! We will run after you.*" (Song of Solomon 1:4)
- The word *follows* in some translation means clinging or glued to
- What is that glue? asks St. Augustine, "The glue itself is love, which fastens us behind God, that we may follow Him. But we should not cling to God, but (behind) God; so that He precedes us, and we follow Him."
- St. Chrysostom compares this close and binding union to the nails of the Cross

# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- David's deep communion with God did not take away his problems
- David was in the wilderness hiding from a conspiracy to kill him
- There were still those who wanted to kill him
- *Those*, his enemies, who are seeking his life, are contrasted with himself
- While his path is upward to God, theirs is downward to the depths of earth
- We have to remember that David views his enemies, not merely as his own enemies, but as the foes of God and of Israel



# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- St. Augustine asks, “What are *the lower parts of the earth*? Earthly lusts. Better it is to walk upon earth, than by lust to go under earth. For everyone that in prejudice of his salvation desires earthly things, is under the earth: because earth he hath put before him, earth upon himself he hath put, and himself beneath he hath laid.”
- He continued, “Fearing to lose earth, they said of the LORD JESUS: “If we let Him thus alone, the Romans will come, and take away our place and nation.” Behold, they have lost at the hands of the Romans the place, because they slew CHRIST.”

# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- David trusted God to deal with his enemies
- In God's time and in God's way, David's enemies did *fall by the sword*, which has the sense of being killed in battle
- The second book of Samuel (18:16-17) tells us how Absalom and those who followed him died and found no one to bury them; how Absalom himself was cast into a pit in the woods, and a very large heap of stones was laid over him
- David was confident that his enemies will diminish, they will fall on the battlefield, and be left unburied to become the prey of *jackals*

# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- *A portion for jackals*, Their bodies shall be unburied upon the earth, and thereby become a prey to wild and hungry animals, and especially to foxes
- According to St. Augustine, the jackals refer to those who rejected Christ to be their king, and said: “We only want Caesar to be our king” (John 19:15)
- They rejected the Lamb and chose the jackals, and so deserved to be a portion for the jackals
- The sense of *swears by Him* is to trust in God
- Those who are loyal to God, who appeal to Him in all troubles, will find this promise true



# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- The contrast to trusting God is to *speak lies*
- Those who *speak lies* are those who rebel against God
- One of these paths has a future of *glory* and the other path will *be stopped*
- St. Augustine says, “For stopped up is the mouth of men speaking unjust things.’ When in weakness the Lamb was, even foxes were bold against the Lamb. There conquered the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the foxes were silenced.”
- David repeatedly ends his Psalms with the full confidence that God is going to answer his prayer and show mercy toward him

# Trust Despite the Trouble

## 63:9-11



- Instead of anticipating destruction as the Lord's enemies could, David confidently rejoiced
- Everyone who sides with God, as David did, can do the same
- Meditation on the Character and works of God can bring invigoration to any believer
- Meditation on God fills a basic need in the heart of every person, as basic a need as food and drink
- It not only satisfies the believer but overflows in praise, making him or her a blessing to others

# Discussion



- Where was David when he wrote this Psalm? What might he be experiencing? (Think about outer and inner struggles)
- Why is David's longing to be in the presence of God more profound when we take the circumstances under which he wrote this Psalm into account?
- What was the resulting impression on David's mind when he beheld God?
- What does it mean to cling to the Lord?



# Discussion



- What happens when David begins to think of who God is and how He has worked in his life?
- When will David be satisfied and praise God?
- How does David view his enemies?
- What do we learn about God in this Psalm?
- What do we learn about praise from this Psalm?