



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 66

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. A Song. A Psalm*
- As with Psalm 65, it is described as both a *Song* and a *Psalm*
- The Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic translations, call it a Psalm of the Resurrection
- There is no mention of the name of the author in the title
- Although its author is not known, but a few commentators ascribe it to David
- The occasion on which the Psalm was composed is not known and cannot be determined



Introduction

- Many believe that it is supposed to be a celebration of the return from Babylon
- Others think it commemorates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, their entering into the Promised Land, and the establishment of the worship of God in Jerusalem
- Others count it as a Maccabee thanksgiving
- And some assume it to speak of the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib
- The language of verse 9 clearly refers to some wonderful intervention by which God had delivered the nation from a danger which threatened its existence



Introduction

- Like the last Psalm, this one is a liturgical praise sung by the people on a joyful occasion, probably the Feast of Passover
- It is another Psalm of thanksgiving
- *Selah* (4, 7, 15) is some sort of musical notation, perhaps signaling a pause or a change of volume or intensity
- In this Psalm, the psalmist uses *Selah* to signal transitions
- His talk about *the house of the Lord* (13) does not necessarily refer to the temple of Solomon, as the tabernacle of the meeting was also called the house of God (Exodus 23:19; Judges 18:31,19:18)



Introduction

Psalm Outline:

- The psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5
- Remembering God's Salvation Works 66:6-7
- Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12
- Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15
- A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- These two verses are full of words with cheerfulness, might, and power; *joyful shout, sing, glory, and praise*
- All the earth is called to worship God and acknowledge the greatness of His power
- As in the previous and the next Psalm, Psalm 66 has not only Israel in view but *all the earth*
- The psalmist understood that God was not only God over Israel, but the whole world
- It is a call for exultation and praise

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- *Sing out the honor of His name*, Recognize His glory in your praise of Him
- Celebrate in appropriate praise the honor due to His name
- Do not merely thank Him for His kindness to you personally, but magnify Him for His greatness and majesty
- Let the high praises of Him be in your mouths; give Him, the most worthy praise; praise Him in the best manner
- According to St. Augustine, when we praise God by words, as well as by work; and when all our goal in life is the glory of God, and not our own glory, God will not let any thing pass by without glorifying us in Him

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- Specifically, our glorification of God from our whole heart will come back to us
- While seeking from us not to glorify ourselves, He pours His glory on us
- He says, “See, how He takes away what is ours, to give us what is His; How He grants us His glory... Sing, therefore, not for the sake of your name, but for the sake of the name of the Lord your God. Sing, for Him to be glorified... Let us cling to Him, and be glorified in Him!”

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- One may begin to praise God by thinking upon the greatness of His work in creation, salvation, and restoration
- Then, by telling God *how awesome* His *works* are
- Praise may continue in the recognition of the great *power* of God, which brought forth the *awesome* works
- This awesome and powerful God has *enemies*, but through His great power they will be conquered and brought to *submit themselves* to God
- Verse 3 declares the need to shout praise to God because of God's triumph over the enemies

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- Every person will bow his knee to God, whether willingly or unwillingly
- They submit because they cannot do otherwise; it is not their faithfulness, but His power, which keeps them subjects of His infinite dominion
- St. Augustine says, “Wherefore with fear and trembling? He has subjoined the reason: ‘for God it is that works in you both to will and to work according to good will.’ If therefore God works in you, by the Grace of God you work well, not by your strength. Therefore, if you rejoice, fear also: lest perchance that which was given to a humble man be taken away from a proud one....”

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- The earth always worships and gives praises to God; everything about the creation praises God
- It also signifies all the inhabitants of the world will bow down before God
- The time will come when He will be worshiped by everyone as the true God
- *They shall sing praises to Your name*, God would not be worshipped as an unknown God; His nature and works will be the matter of earth's song
- Acceptable worship praises God through the knowledge of His character

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- St. Augustine says, “Vain have been the lies of the Jews; He Whom they branded as a deceiver is worshipped and praised over all the Gentile world, and not only there, but in the courts of heaven, because His Name is above every name. A little before, most lowly, now Most Highest; most lowly in the hands of lying enemies, Most Highest above the heads of praising Angels.”
- *Selah*, It is to signal transition
- It may also denote that this is a well attested truth
- And it may be a pause for contemplation
- *Come and see*, The psalmist felt that perhaps others might be slow to think of God’s awesome works

The Psalmist Calls the Earth to Praise God 66:1-5



- He would help, describing how *He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men*
- The nations are invited to contemplate God's mighty works for His people in the past, and to learn that the sovereignty to which they bear witness is eternal and universal
- *Come and see* what God has done and is doing to witness and experience it firsthand; come and learn from this what He is
- People can begin to praise God when they see and experience His wonders and works personally
- Father Onesimus of Jerusalem says, "All who believe in Him, and who meditate in His works, will perceive how awesome He is."

Remembering God's Salvation

Works 66:6-7



- The psalmist turned to the history of the Holy Scriptures and remembered how God showed His power in bringing Israel through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21) and through the Jordan River (Joshua 3:14-16)
- These events are referred to as the most notable of His awesome acts in verse 5
- It is an illustration of His power, and of His ability to defend and deliver His people
- To the Israelites it was altogether a matter of joy and rejoicing (Exodus 15:1-21)

Remembering God's Salvation

Works 66:6-7



- The psalmist says, *there, we will rejoice in Him*, counting the joy of the people of old in their salvation, as his own joy, as well as that of the people of every generation
- Spiritually speaking, the secret of the rejoicing, according to St. Augustine, is that the believers' souls turn from a sea to dry land, on which one goes through by foot
- The world, notes St. Augustine, was a sea, bitter with saltiness, troubled with storms, raging with waves of persecution
- Truly, the sea has been turned into dry land, and now, the world that was filled with salted water thirsts for water that is sweet, so that now the world cries: "*My soul longs for You like a thirsty land.*" (Psalm 143:6)

Remembering God's Salvation

Works 66:6-7



- What He did for all the world He does for every soul flooded with the salt sea of repentant tears, drying it up
- *They went through the river on foot*, It is spoken of the courage with which the faithful shall pass through this life, (St. Augustine) not affected by the flood of worldliness, and yet on foot, because lowly, and not lifted up with pride
- St. Augustine continues, “*we will rejoice*, Far more truly in passing from the waters of sin to the haven of quiet and safety. For even if we are joyous now, in hope we are joyous, but then in Him shall we be joyous. Even now in Him, yet through hope, but then “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12).”

Remembering God's Salvation

Works 66:6-7



- *He rules by His power forever*, What is true for the past is true for the present and the future
- God's sovereignty is eternal
- God keeps constant watch upon the heathen nations, whose general attitude is that of hostility to His people lest His people should suffer at their hands
- They can conceal nothing from Him
- Although they may professedly be submissive (ver. 3), their submission is not to be depended on
- At any time, rebellion may break out, His people be attacked, and *the nations* endeavor to *exalt themselves*

Remembering God's Salvation

Works 66:6-7



- All such attempts, however, will be in vain, since *He rules by His power forever*
- A warning to those who persistently and repeatedly resist God's will to humble themselves
- St. Augustine says, "Let them be humbled in themselves, exalted in Christ. For, 'he that humbles himself shall be exalted; and he that exalts himself shall be humbled.'"
- *His eyes observe the nations*, May also mean it is the look of compassion longing for the return and salvation of those *rebellious*
- *Selah*, a pause for contemplation and a transition as well



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- A renewed call to the nations to praise God for His deliverance of Israel from dangers
- *bless our God*, When the psalmist calls people to bless God, he is calling them to kneel in worship and honor to Him as a demonstration of reverence and an expression of praise
- *make the voice of His praise to be heard*, By declaring it to others
- St. Augustine says, “Praise not yourselves, but praise Him. What is the voice of His praise? That by His Grace we are whatever of good we are.”
- Compel unwilling ears to hear the praises of your God



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- In verse 9, the psalmist is explaining why the people ought to *make the voice of His praise to be heard*
- The nation was on the point of death and ruin, but God preserved and supported it
- The tenses indicate that the words are not the statement of a general truth, but refer particularly to the deliverance from the trial described in the following verses
- God preserves His people, giving them life
- *does not allow our feet to be moved*, Because He has set those feet upon a Rock, firm and unshaken



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- The psalmist praised God for life, but also recognized the hardships of life
- In verses 10-12 he describes the nature of the trials the people have felt
- With fire, first of persecutions and sufferings, and then with the more searching fire of heavenly love
- St. Cyril of Alexandria says, "For the odor of a saintly life needs the divine fire to make its perfume known, as incense requires glowing coals to quicken its properties."
- St. Augustine says, "*As silver*, which is purified by heat, not as straw, which is burnt up by it."



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- And note, that the precise moment when silver is truly refined, is that in which the finer can see his face exactly mirrored in the burning surface
- Whereby we know that our purification is complete, when CHRIST can see His Image reflected in our hearts
- *You brought us into the net*, The allusion here is to the efforts made by their enemies to take them, as hunters spread nets to capture wild beasts
- God had deliberately brought them into the power of their enemies, to punish them for their sins



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- God sometimes allows for His children to be brought into a net set by the enemy, and to be weighed down in humiliation; but only for a limited time, to chasten and refine them, or to justify and crown them
- His martyrs were brought into the snare of dungeons and prisons, chains, and suffered tortures, heavy weights and even plates of burning metal, laid upon them
- *You have caused men to ride over our heads*, The psalmist says that they used to stand in battle and fight on equal footing with their enemies, then they were cast down and felt them riding in triumph over them



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- Where once they seemed to only know victory, now they feel the sting of defeat
- *We went through fire and through water*, They feel that they have been through it all, and it seems that no adversity has been kept from them
- It may be explained, as St. Augustine says, of the mingled sorrows and pleasures of this life
- The psalmist said to God that he understood, that in some ultimate sense, their affliction was *from You* – it was allowed by God Himself



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- As they continued to trust in God, He vindicated Himself and their trust, not only delivering them from difficulty, but bringing them *out to rich fulfillment*
- This *rich fulfillment* would never have come apart from the many difficulties
- One may ask: “why should we praise God when we are going through all of this turmoil?”
- Verse 9 was one answer: God has preserved their lives through all that they have to endure
- The second reason is in verse 12: *You brought us out to rich fulfillment*



Praising God for His Recent Deliverance of His People 66:8-12

- Despite all that we must endure and suffer, we are always brought out into the abundance and blessings of God
- God keeps us in life and goes with us through the fire into abundance and blessing
- There is the other side that we come out from that we cannot see when in the midst of the storm of life
- We have no comprehension how any thing good could happen or even how our lives would work out in the trial
- As we walk through fire and water, the water of repentant tears, and the fire of divine love, our faith is being refined and God is with us

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- In the final passage of this Psalm, the psalmist speaks about the praise he will give as an individual
- He begins by describing how he comes into the house of God with offerings and payment of vows
- The people's leader and representative enters the Temple to pay the vows which he made in the hour of national distress
- The strict performance of vows was always held to be one of the main obligations
- A vow was like an agreement with God, and to break it was an act of deliberate dishonesty

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- The Mosaic Law allowed vows of various kinds, as the vowing of children to the service of God (Leviticus 27:1-8; 1 Samuel 1:11); the vow of the Nazarite (Numbers 6:2-21); and vows of clean or unclean animals (Leviticus 27:9-13,27-29), etc.
- Clean animals, when vowed, must be either redeemed or sacrificed
- The Psalmist determined to praise God by obeying His command regarding sacrifices, bringing them to the altar of God
- He, having encouraged all people to praise the Lord, here declares it to be his own decree and promise to worship and serve Him and set a good example to all the people

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- The psalmist had promised God certain sacrifices and he would not sin by failing to bring these
- St. Augustine comments on *I will go into Your house* and says, “either by withdrawing into myself for secret communion with You, remembering that my body is the temple of the HOLY SPIRIT, or into the place of Your public worship, or at last into the heavenly City. *With burnt-offerings*, having consumed all that is mine, by victory over self, and leaving only what is GOD’S.”
- It is true of Christ Who ascended into the Holy of holies with the whole burnt-offering of Himself

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- And true of the martyrs who offered their bodies as a sacrifice
- *My vows*, whether of baptism, of the religious life, or of self-dedication of any kind
- The word *pay* means that such vows are debts not mere voluntary offerings which do not need to be made
- *Which my lips have uttered And my mouth has spoken*, Implying a distinct clear agreement made with God, not a mere passing promise of the mind, but a positive action of the will
- Vows were commonly made in a time of trouble, or of difficulty (Judges 11:30-31; 1 Samuel 1:11)

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- The psalmist would fulfill his vows to God with generous, expensive sacrifices, offering multiple animals
- What he brought to God was of the best; they were *fat animals*
- *sweet aroma of rams*, The word here rendered *aroma* is commonly applied to incense which was burned in the tabernacle or temple, producing a sweet odor (Isaiah 1:13)
- But it seems here to be used with reference to the smoke ascending from burning *rams* offered in sacrifice - ascending as the smoke of incense did

Paying Vows in the Name of the People 66:13-15



- St. Augustine comments on *With the sweet aroma of rams* and says, “The rams are the rulers of the Church: the whole Body of Christ is speaking: this is the thing which he offers to God. Incense is what? Prayer. The incense of rams is therefore the prayer offered as incense before GOD by the rulers of the Church.”
- Bulls, which labor in the LORD’S field, signify clergy and servants; while the goats are repentant sinners
- *Selah*, A pause for contemplation and as a transition

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- In verse 5 the psalmist called on all to *come and see* God's works toward humanity
- The psalmist now addresses all to *come and hear* his individual witness
- All who *fear God*, all who are true worshippers of God, are invited to hear what He has done for the psalmist in order that He might be fittingly honored, and that due praise might be given Him
- The vow of the psalmist was not fulfilled through sacrifice alone
- He also had an obligation to proclaim God's goodness, to *declare what He has done for my soul*

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- He offered both the sacrifice of animals and the sacrifice of praise
- He wants to share his praise to God with others so they can know what God has done
- St. Augustine says, “But to whom, ‘Come ye, and hear’? ‘All ye that fear God.’ If God you fear not, I will not tell. It is not possible that it be told to any where the fear of God is not. Let the fear of God open the ears, that there may be something to enter in, and a way whereby may enter in that which I am going to tell.”
- *I cried to Him with my mouth*, Vocal, ardent, and fervent prayer
- At the same time the psalmist prayed for deliverance out of his distresses, he praised God for the mercies he had received

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- No one should think that God could be persuaded merely through sacrifices
- It was important to make clear that the psalmist did not only offer sacrifices but also from a pure heart
- He did not hold on to *iniquity* in his *heart*
- Hypocrisy disqualifies the suppliant person, but the psalmist is confident that he is no hypocrite, and the answer to his prayer justifies him
- There is no self-righteousness in this, but he has clear conscience with no offence toward God and men

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- He means to say, “if I have not been willing to forsake all sin; if I recognized iniquity in my heart, and disregarded, encouraged, or was pleased with it.”
- The meaning is not literally, *If I regard iniquity in my heart*, for no one can look into his own heart, and not see that it is defiled by sin
- But, If he had cherished it in his soul; if he had rejoiced over past sins; if he had thought on it with pleasure, and approved it with his will
- *The Lord will not hear*, In order that prayer may be heard, there must be a purpose to forsake all forms of sin

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- This is a great and most important principle in regard to prayer
- If we regard wickedness in our hearts, then God is not going to listen to us
- We should not be surprised to see our prayers unanswered if we do not care to remove iniquity from our hearts
- The psalmist's prayer had been answered so unmistakably, so directly
- God did listen, implying that He found the psalmist innocent of evil intent
- God has given him evidence that He has heard his prayer

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- St. Augustine says, “Here, the speaker has reached to resurrection, which we actually anticipate and hope for.”
- The psalmist understood how wonderful it was that God received his prayer, and how it made God more to be praised, *Blessed be God*
- The psalmist, therefore, praises God, who has not turned away his prayer, and who has not withheld His mercy from him
- Thus, he told them what God had done for his soul
- *He has attended to the voice of my prayer*, We would expect the next verse to be, *Therefore, there is no iniquity in my heart*

A Call to all Those Who Fear God to Praise Him 66:16-20



- Yet the psalmist completed the Psalm in an unexpected way, praising the *mercy* of God
- His mercy endures forever and is from *everlasting to everlasting on them that fear Him*, Psalm 103:17; all which require thankfulness and praise, which is here given
- God will not turn back the prayers of the righteous
- Further, God does not remove His love from us
- These are important reminders during our trials
- St. Augustine says, “When you see that your supplication was not turned away, you should be sure that His mercy is not turned away from you as well.”



Discussion

- The Psalm begins with a call to *Make a joyful shout to God*. Does making *a joyful shout* describe our worship of God?
- What are the psalmist's reasons for worshipping God?
- Who are God's enemies?
- Could we be among God's enemies? Why, or why not?



Discussion

- How can the writer of this Psalm be confident that verse 4 will happen?
- How does this psalmist maintain a right attitude towards his sin?
- What two things do we praise God for in this Psalm?
- What does this Psalm reveal about how we can make our prayers effective?