



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 76

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song*
- The title indicates, as it was mentioned in previous Psalms, that it was directed toward the *Chief Musician*, whom some suppose to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph
- *On a stringed instrument*, It is probably the name of a musical instrument of eight strings, perhaps a harp, which was touched by the hand, or with a feather or bow



Introduction

- *Asaph* was the great singer and musician of David and Solomon's time (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7; 2 Chronicles 29:13)
- 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 2 Chronicles 29:30 add that Asaph was a prophet in his musical compositions
- Some scholars think this Psalm have been composed after the defeat of Sennacherib and after the death of David, and after the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah were separated, as evident from verse 1
- So, they attribute this Psalm to a later Asaph, or to someone who was the literal or spiritual descendant of the Asaph of David and Solomon's time



Introduction

- It is not certain which conflict or battle is commemorated in this Psalm
- It is generally thought to be written on account of some great victory obtained by the Jews over their enemies, perhaps the Ammonites in the times of David 2 Samuel 12:26
- Other commentators believe it refers to the time when the Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17-19:37)
- Before they could attack, most of the army were mysteriously and miraculously killed in the night



Introduction

- Or, in the time of Jehoshaphat, when his enemies were defeated in a wonderful manner, which brought great joy and thankfulness, 2 Chronicles 20:1
- Comparing Psalms 75 and 76, lead to the conclusion that both were inspired by the Song of Hannah and may both refer to the same circumstances
- This Psalm and Psalm 75 can be viewed as a paired set
- Faith in Psalm 75 sung of victories to come, and Psalm 76 sings of triumphs achieved



Introduction

- Psalm 75 praises God, in general, for His righteous character, and His protection in the past of His people, anticipating God's intervention in the future
- So, Psalm 75 can be read as a prayer for God's deliverance; Psalm 76 as a prayer of thanks after God's deliverance
- The Psalm praises God for the righteous victory He brought about on behalf of His people
- It is good and proper to seek God in prayer at all times, at every step of the way, before, during and after every event of our lives



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Greatness of God in Zion 76:1-3
- Praise to the Triumphant God 76:4-6
- Giving Honor to the Great God 76:7-9
- Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12

The Greatness of God in Zion

76:1-3



- Asaph happily proclaimed that God was *known* in Judah and that *His name is great in Israel*
- *God is known*, He has revealed Himself and has made Himself known by His word and by the glorious works of His wisdom and power
- But while God is revealed all over the world, to peoples of all nations, by the revelation of His great works and creation, God had made Himself known in a special way to the people of Israel
- He spoke directly to them; He gave them His law; He raised up prophets to instruct and guide His people

The Greatness of God in Zion

76:1-3



- The nations had their ideas of deity, but the true revelation of God came through the Jewish people – the covenant descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- God has a further connection with Israel; it is in their land that He chose to make *His dwelling place* and to establish *His tabernacle*
- God not only revealed Himself to them, He chose to dwell there
- Asaph's mention of the *tabernacle* is likely that the tabernacle was brought to *Salem*, to the city of *Zion*, when David brought the ark of the covenant there (2 Samuel 6)

The Greatness of God in Zion

76:1-3



- It seems that *Salem* was the ancient name for Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18, Hebrew 7:1-2)
- *Salem*, Means peace; God's place is in peace
- By using this term for the city of God, the Psalmist reminds God's people of the peace that could happen had after God's intervention and protection on their behalf
- *His tabernacle*, may be interpreted of the human nature of Christ, the true tabernacle in which the Divine Word when He was made flesh dwelt among the Jews at Jerusalem, and in other parts of Judea, Hebrews 8:2

The Greatness of God in Zion

76:1-3



- *Salem* or Jerusalem often signifies the church of God in Gospel times, in the midst of which Christ resides, Hebrews 12:22
- And in the New Jerusalem the tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will dwell among them, Revelation 21:2
- The expression *there* seems certainly to show that the deliverance celebrated took place at, or very near to, Jerusalem
- Jerusalem became the center of Israel when David conquered the city and brought peace to the city of peace (2 Samuel 5:6-10)
- In many ways before and after, God breaks the weapons of those set against Him and His people

The Greatness of God in Zion

76:1-3



- God miraculously intervened on behalf of His people
- Foolish they are who fight against God; defeat is certain
- Whatever mighty weapons man can shape are worthless in the face of an all-powerful God
- According to St. Augustine, those who do not confess their sins, and haughtily enter, as though into a battle against God, all their weapons on which they depend, will be broken
- St. Augustine says, “the war which they were waging against God by defending their sins, all these things He has broken there.”
- *Selah*, Pause for contemplation

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- The psalmist continues, speaking of God's glory and power and thought of the beauty and the bounty of the *mountains of prey*
- He knew that the Lord God was *more glorious and excellent than* these beautiful places
- The psalmist, in speaking of God's *glorious and excellent*, seems to struggle to come up with words to describe the infinite glory and power of God due to the limited human vocabulary
- The word *prey* as employed here means that which is obtained by hunting; and then, steal and rob
- It is usually applied to the food of wild beasts, beasts of prey

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- Here it refers to the mountains considered as the dwelling or stronghold of robbers and thieves, from where they go out in search of victims
- These mountains, in their heights, their rocks, their strongholds, provided safe places of retreat for robbers, and hence, they became symbols of power
- The psalmist says that God is greater, stronger, and has more splendor than all the earthly kingdom, however great is their dominion and terror on the face of the earth
- The dominion of those kingdoms is just for a certain time, whereas that of God is eternal

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- Their greatness will come to an end in an instant; whereas the glory and greatness of God will never end
- A vivid description of the adversity now follows
- The aggressors, the men who came so confidently to the invasion, the great dominant race, that has spoiled all the nations of the earth, and fears no one, became powerless and were spoiled, and their armor and riches became a prey to those they thought to have made a prey of
- As the Assyrians and others tried to invade some countries for spoil

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- Instead of taking spoil, they had to forsake their own treasures, and flee, leaving behind them as spoil what they have got in their own hand
- The God who is greater than the mountains also helped His people in battle
- He helped them by confounding their enemies who were *sunk into their sleep*
- The mighty men, suddenly can make no resistance; they are paralyzed; they cannot even move a hand
- They became utterly unable to bear arms, whether for offense, or even for defending themselves

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- This refers to those who have put their whole hope in temporal things
- Their life would soon pass away as a dream they saw in their sleep, then woke up to find themselves got nothing
- Their weakness is laughable in comparison to God's might
- Whatsoever strength, courage, intelligence, or any other skill any man has, God who gave it, can take it away when He pleases
- *At Your rebuke*, A word accomplished all; they were terrified by a word spoken by God
- God of the covenant and the promise, fought for His people

Praise to the Triumphant God

76:4-6



- It was not by any human means that this immense army was overthrown; it was by the power of God alone
- The horses were stretched on the ground, and the chariots stood still, as if the whole camp had fallen asleep
- *The chariot* horses, as well as the men, were all overpowered in the same night
- St. Augustine asks, “Who are they who ride horses? Those who refuse to be humble. It is not a sin to ride horses, but it is a sin for man to “lift up his horn on high, and to speak with a stiff neck” (Psalm 75:5); and to think of himself as more distinguished than others.”

Giving Honor to the Great God

76:7-9



- Asaph thought of the importance of giving honor and reverence to the great God
- He emphasized the personal aspect of it that God Himself is *to be feared*, more than the things He may do
- By saying *You, Yourself*, the psalmist means to say: *You, alone, are to be feared*, and there is no one like You
- We fear much in this world, but it is God “alone” whom we should fear
- *who may stand in Your presence*, This is a question for any and all who dwell on earth; no one had the power to do it

Giving Honor to the Great God

76:7-9



- Surely, neither the wisdom of the wise, nor the power of the mighty, nor the world itself, can stand a single moment before Him *When once He are angry*
- In the previous verse, the psalmist says that the adversaries will be cast into *a dead sleep*
- And now he says, *who may stand in Your presence* , Meaning, with the coming of the day of judgment, there would be no more chance to stand before the Lord, neither to oppose, nor to repent
- Then they will realize just how much they deserve the anger of God

Giving Honor to the Great God

76:7-9



- Our respect and reverence for God goes beyond admiration of His greatness
- It is also connected to our knowledge of His righteousness, His power, and His authority as Judge
- There is no standing before His justice, and at His judgment seat, with boldness and confidence without having on His righteousness
- *You caused judgment to be heard from heaven*, The overthrow of these enemies was a manifest judgment from God
- The world itself seemed to hear the voice of God, and to stand in awe

Giving Honor to the Great God

76:7-9



- *was still*, It seemed to be profoundly attentive to God's voice
- Some think there was an earthquake when the angel struck the Assyrian camp
- It may regard the panic the other nations were in when they heard of it
- It is not uncommon in the Scriptures to represent the earth - the hills, the mountains, the streams, the rivers, the plains - as conscious of the presence of God; as either rejoicing or trembling at His voice, Psalm 65:12-13, 114:3-7; Habakkuk 3:8-11
- It may also refer to the second coming of Christ and to last judgment

Giving Honor to the Great God

76:7-9



- When Christ the Judge shall descend from heaven, the voice of the archangel shall be heard, the last trumpet shall sound, the dead in their graves shall hear it, and rise and stand before the judgment seat
- God uses His righteous might not primarily to defend Himself, but to *deliver all the oppressed*
- He cares about the poor and needy, and every deed will be recompensed when God rises *to judgment*
- According to St. Augustine the meek in heart are those who in their humility have confessed their own sins

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- In verse 9, Asaph considered the judgments of God and how God uses His judgment to *deliver the oppressed*
- In this he sees the perfect wisdom and providence of God, who can work all things together so marvelously that He will make *the wrath of man* bring Him praise
- All rebellion against God's will must in the end lead and contribute to God's glory
- It serves to set His sovereignty in a clearer light, (Exodus 9:16)
- All that will not submit shall be subdued

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- The Holy Bible and history are filled with the fulfillment of this promise and principle
- Haman was filled with wrath against Mordecai; God used the wrath of Haman to bring Himself praise
- The religious leaders of Jesus' day were filled with wrath against God's own Son; God used the wrath of the religious leaders to bring Himself praise
- We can see this principle fulfilled in history too
- *With the remainder of wrath*, it probably means man's wrath

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- The mighty works of God affect different people in different ways
- First comes the promise to bring good out of even the wrath of man, and then the promise is to *restrain* that wrath
- The idea seems to be that all *the wrath* which is manifested among people would be made to praise God and all which would not contribute to this end He would prevent its being to continue so that all should be under His control
- There was nothing in the heart or the purposes of man that was beyond His authority or control
- Man could do nothing in his wrathful plans that God could not end or abolish in His own way, and for His own honor

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- *gird Yourself*, It may mean here that God would gird it on as a sword, and would make use of it as a weapon for executing His own purposes
- Some translate *gird Yourself* God girds on Himself as an ornament
- God will even *adorn* Himself with *the remainder* of man's wrath against Him and His people turning them to His own honor
- Asaph brought a logical conclusion to the facts presented
- If God is this great, then we owe our *vows* to *Him*, and *vows* made should be paid

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- The people of Israel are now addressed
- Under the circumstances, they most likely have made vows to God in the time of their great trouble, as the great invading army surrounded Jerusalem and before the deliverance came
- The psalmist reminds the people to *pay them*
- As God keeps His promises, His people ought to keep theirs
- St. Augustine says, “What ought we all in common to vow? To believe in Him, to hope from Him for life eternal, to live godly according to a measure common to all. For there is a certain measure common to all men.”

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- Many fathers distinguish between the collective vow of all the believers, and the individual vow
- The collective vow is the dedication of the whole heart and all its energies to God
- If the Lord Christ says: *“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also be sanctified by the truth”* (John 17: 19); it is for us to say back: “For Your sake, O Lord, we sanctify ourselves, for You, and by You, O Holy One”
- The individual vow is not for all, but is according to how much love for God, and longing for exaltation and perfection, the believer proclaims

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- St. Augustine gave some examples of vows proper for individuals
- One vows to God marital chastity, that he will know no other woman besides his wife, so also the woman, that she will know no other man besides her husband
- Others vow even virginity from the beginning of life ... and these men have vowed the greatest vow
- Others vow that their house shall be a place of rest for all the Saints that may come: a great vow they vow
- Another vows to sell all his goods to be distributed to the poor, and go into a community, into a society of the Saints: a great vow

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- He says, “Vow and pay to the Lord our God. Let each one vow what he shall have willed to vow; let him give heed to this, that he pay what he has vowed. If any man does look back with regard to what he has vowed to God, it is an evil.”
- We can and should honor God with more than our vows
- In humble submission we should *bring presents to Him*, giving to Him our first and our best
- Even the *princes* and the *kings of the earth* can and should see the awe of this great God
- *He shall cut off the spirit of princes*, He will cut down their pride

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- They should keep their vows to Him and bring presents to honor Him
- No one is excluded from the reverence and praise of the great God and King
- Before the mighty works of God, even the most powerful rulers stand in awe and in fear
- The psalmist try here to allude to what God had done as celebrated in this Psalm
- He had shown that He could rebuke the pride and self-confidence of kings and could bring them low at His feet

Honoring the God Who Rules Over All 76:10-12



- They are wholly under His control; He can defeat their plans; He can, and will, make their plans - even their wrath - the means of carrying out His own purposes; He will allow them to proceed no further in their plans of evil than He can use it to the continuation of His own
- *He is awesome to the kings of the earth*, If they are not wise as to submit themselves to Him, He will force them to call in vain to *mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from his wrath*, Revelation 6:16
- As St. Augustine says, “All humble men do confess to Him, and do adore Him.”

Discussion



- What act of God does the introduction of the Psalm describe?
- What attribute of the Lord does this Psalm celebrate?
- How did the Lord defend His dwelling place in Zion?
- What imagery is used to celebrate the majesty of the Lord?



Discussion

- How did the Lord's deliverance of Israel demonstrate His power?
- Why should we fear the Lord?
- How does the earth respond to God's judgment?
- How does this Psalm encourage us to respond to God's help?
- What can we know about God from this Psalm?