



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 85

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah*
- *To the Chief Musician*, is thought by some to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose him to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:33, 16:5-7, and 25:6)
- These *sons of Korah* were Levites, from the family of Kohath
- By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19)
- They served as temple gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 9:19,26:1,19), as well as bakers (1 Chronicles 9:31)

Introduction



- Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers 16)
- God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, *“the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together.”* (Numbers 16:32)
- But the sons of Korah remained, *“Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.”* (Numbers 26:11)
- Their name came as the sons of Korah in ten Psalms: 44-48 and 84-88
- Some think that this Psalm might have been sent to them to be sung, or one of them might have been its author



Introduction

- As to the time when it was written, it seems to have been written during, or even after, the return from the Babylon captivity when they still remained under some signs of God's displeasure, which they here pray for the removal of it
- Its whole tone belongs to that time
- The Psalm is filled with promises in the midst of a time of waiting and uncertainty
- It is the prayer of a patriot for his afflicted country, in which he pleads the Lord's past mercies, and by faith expects brighter days



Introduction

- This Psalm is essentially a prayer for God to restore His people
- It may belong to an earlier time in history, but God's people can find themselves in this place from time to time, and this beautiful Psalm is appropriate to pray
- It is a Psalm that suits the church that is constantly persecuted by the world
- The whole Psalm seems to have a reference to the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ where in Christ almost every word of the second part finds its fulfilment
- It is one of the Sixth Hour prayer Psalms of the Book of Agpeya



introduction

Psalm Outline

- Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3
- Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7
- Confidence in God's Response 85:8-13

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- Verses 1-3, They are to acknowledge with thankfulness the great things God had done for them
- God has forgiven and restored His people
- God is thanked for two things especially:
 - (1) for having, partially, removed His chastening hand from them, and given them a return of prosperity (verse 1); and
 - (2) for having granted His people forgiveness of their sins (verses 2 and 3)
- The psalmist finds relief in God's care for His land
- Notably, the land of Israel is called *Your land*

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- The Holy Bible tells us that all the earth belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1)
- And yet there is an undeniable way in which Israel is His special possession, with God having a special regard for His *land*
- The Lord chose the land of Canaan for the people of Israel, and put them into the possession of it
- He Himself chose to dwell there and had a sanctuary built for Him
- Therefore, though the whole earth is His, yet this was His land and inheritance in a special manner, as it is called, Jeremiah 16:18

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- This also refers to the coming of the Savior
- The land that rebelled against God, and was defiled by idol worship, is saved by His coming
- God cursed the land that He created and gave to man to inhabit, on account of the sin of the first man
- But God also blessed the land, by sending His Only Begotten Son into that land which He created
- *the captivity of Jacob*, The meaning in a temporal sense, both out of Egypt, and out of Babylon
- And in a spiritual sense from sin and Satan

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- The redemption by Christ is a deliverance from their captivity
- By Jacob the Psalmist means, not only the people of Israel, but the whole human race, *“being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree;”* (Romans 11:17)
- The psalmist now explains the manner in which God, by His blessing the land, put an end to the captivity of Jacob, and says it was by remitting the sins of His people
- The *iniquity* that once hindered the relationship with God, was now taken away

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- God's remission of punishment, and restoration of His people was a full indication that He had *forgiven their iniquity* and *covered their sins*
- *You have covered all their sin*, This is but another phrase for forgiveness, and this is done by the blood and righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ
- *Covered*, Nothing can be hidden or concealed from God, when He, therefore, forgives sin, He takes it away altogether; so that it has no longer any existence whatever
- This was a great blessing, that a pause for devout acknowledgment and silent worship seemed fitting, *Selah*

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- Verse 2 speaks of God forgiving Israel's iniquity and sin
- Verse 3 explains the effect of that forgiveness
- Because God has forgiven Israel's sin, it is as if they had never sinned
- God no longer has cause to be angry with them
- They were once the subjects of God's judgment, and now they were delivered from it
- There is special beauty in the words *all Your wrath*, speaking of a complete work
- There is great relief in knowing God's *anger* has passed

Thanksgiving to God for Past Mercies 85:1-3



- As with the previous verse (*covered all their sin*), this looks forward to the complete work of Jesus on the cross, where He satisfied God's righteous requirement to the full with a *once-for-all* sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27,9:12,10:10)
- This is especially true when considering the *fierceness* of His anger
- St. Jerome says, "*You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.*" See the extent of the power of repentance; it keeps man from falling under the wrath of God."



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- There is a prayer in this passage of verses 4-7
- Two things are prayed for: first, that God will turn the hearts of His people wholly towards Himself (verse 4)
- And secondly, that He will complete His work of deliverance by removing the traces, that still exist, of His past anger (verses 5-7)
- The psalmist began by thanking God for return and restoration
- In light of that past mercy, the psalmist now prays for continued and present restoration
- Israel is still in a state of great distress and weakness, suffering from the natural consequences of its sins, which keep it depressed and sad



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- *Restore us, O God of our salvation*, The psalmist seeks God's divine assistance, through which their returning to God begins
- He is asking that God turn them from their sins; bring them to repentance; make them willing to forsake every evil way; and enable them to do it
- For they cannot be changed and renewed to God, unless His grace go before them, and by calling, enlightening, assisting, and moving, transform them
- We have no authority for asking God to turn away His judgments unless we are willing to forsake our sins and offer repentance



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- *cause Your anger toward us to cease*, The idea here is, that if they were turned from sin, the cause of His anger would be removed, and would cease of course
- God's anger is so long continued that it seems as if it would never cease
- The psalmist perseveres in the petition, saying, "we have borne Your anger long enough; do not defer the gift of your mercy, and the restoration of your peace"
- Will Your enmity to the human race be everlasting?
- *anger to all generations*, Not merely the generation which has sinned shall suffer, but the next, and the next, and the next, forever



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- St. Augustine comments on *all generations* and says, “For by the anger of God we are subject to death, and by the anger of God we eat bread on this earth in want, and in the sweat of our face. This was Adam’s sentence when he sinned: and that Adam was every one of us, for ‘in Adam all die;’ the sentence passed on him has taken effect after him on us. For we were not yet ourselves, but we were in Adam: therefore whatever happened to Adam himself took effect on us also, so that we should die: for we all were in him ... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive ...seeing this the Prophet says, ‘Be not angry with us for ever, nor stretch out Thy wrath from one generation to another.’ The first generation was mortal by Thy wrath: the second generation shall be immortal by Thy mercy....”



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- *Will You not revive us again*, This is a simple and wonderful prayer for revival
- The psalmist is asking God to restore them to life once again—to make them whole—to end their suffering
- He tells us the effects that will follow from being reconciled with God; to man will come life, to God praise
- When God brings life to the people once again, they will rejoice—but in a particular way
- They will rejoice that they are once again within the borders of God's grace



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- It is no small matter to be outside God's circle, and Israel know how that feels
- It will be no small matter when they are once again drawn inside God's circle, where they desperately want to be
- *rejoice in You*, Praying for revival means praying that God's work among His people would cause them to find their joy in nothing else than in Him
- We should pray for revival when we sense we are under a cloud of divine displeasure or an evident lack of blessing
- Revival is a work of God's *mercy*



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- It is not earned or deserved
- God graciously grants true revival
- True revival demonstrates that *salvation* is God's work
- Having asked that the divine wrath may be diminished; and having asked for that reconciliation and revival that always accompanies remission of sin, he now asks for the coming of the Savior, through whom we were brought clearly to see and to behold God's kindness and mercy to us, of which the Apostle says, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11)



Prayer for New Mercies 85:4-7

- Salvation can have many expressions, it can mean eternal life, but it can also mean being accepted again to God's grace—or deliverance from one's enemies
- He is asking God to make them plainly see and feel by experience, that mercy through which God determined from eternity, to bless His land; and grant them His salvation
- St. Augustine, taking a moral view of this passage, says that God shows us His mercy when He persuades us, and makes us see and understand that we are nothing, and can do nothing, of ourselves; but that it is through His mercy we exist at all, or can do anything we go through; we thus are neither proud nor puffed up, but are humble in our own eyes; and it is to such people the Savior gives His grace

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- To convince us of the truth of what he now means to express, the psalmist here reminds us that he speaks not from himself, but what has been revealed to him, and that he is only announcing what he has heard from the Lord
- He anticipates a favorable answer to his prayer and proceeds to write down the main points of it
- God *will speak peace To His people*
- The state of mind here is that of patient listening; of a willingness to hear God, whatever God should say; of confidence in Him that what He would say would be favorable to His people - would be words of mercy and of peace

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- Whatever He shall say will tend to their peace, their blessedness, their prosperity
- The psalmist hears God with pleasure and with attention because he knows and is confident, He will speak peace to His people
- The sum-up, then, of God's message to His people is the announcement and promise of peace through the coming of the Messiah, for which the psalmist asked when he said, *Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation*
- God promised peace to His people, but not to everyone; for those who are His followers, *His saints*

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- Then he talks about the way which they had formerly pursued which was *folly*
- It was not mere sin, but there was in it the element of foolishness
- Humility and surrender are proper attitudes for God's people
- They should turn to Him in true repentance, and *not turn back to folly*
- *let them not turn* to doubt of and question the providence of God or to idolatry which there was danger of, upon the Jews' return from Babylon
- The humble and surrendered people of God enjoy the nearness of *His salvation*

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- *His salvation is near to those who fear Him*, Those who have a true sense of their sin and hate it, and depart from it, and do not return unto it
- Those who have a reverent love for God, have a sense of His goodness and His forgiving grace and mercy, and fear Him and serve Him with reverence and godly fear
- The salvation of God, or Christ Himself, the Savior, will be at hand to save all that fear Him; all that worship Him with a holy fear
- As God moves among His people, *glory may dwell in our land*

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- For those who fear the Lord, He will not only be near to them, but will be in them, *“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.”* (2 Corinthians 6:16)
- *glory may dwell in our land*, He sees once more the glory which had so long deserted the land come back
- That they may once again see glorious days in their land
- May also mean Christ the brightness of His Father's glory, Hebrews 1:3; John 1:14, and the glory of His people Israel who, when He was incarnate dwelt among them

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- He now reveals another mystery that will be accomplished on the coming of the Messiah; the union of *mercy* and *truth*, which seem so opposed to each other
- *truth* prompting to punish and *mercy* to forgive; for Christ's passion and suffering was meant to deliver the human race in mercy, while it made the fullest and complete satisfaction to the divine justice
- In beautiful terms the psalmist describes the salvation God brings to His people
- In God's great work of salvation, *mercy and truth have met together*

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- God's lovingkindness and truth—the love which moved Him to enter into covenant with Israel, and the faithfulness which binds Him to be true to His covenant—meet in His work of redemption
- This verse may have been the inspiration for what John later wrote: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14)
- *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:17)

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- Even as mercy and truth meet, so *righteousness and peace* greet each other warmly
- It might seem that *righteousness* would condemn the sinner and prevent God's *peace* from ever reaching him
- In God's great work of salvation, His *righteousness and peace* are friends
- These four divine attributes left at the fall of Adam, and met again at the birth of Jesus Christ
- *Truth shall spring out of the earth*, He now touches on the mystery of the Incarnation

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- Christ, who is the truth, according to His testimony: “*I am the Truth*” (John 14:6), will be born of the Virgin Mary
- How then has He sprung out of the earth?
- According to St. Jerome, by the incarnation of the divine Word in the womb of Virgin Mary
- Then also justice from heaven will be made manifest, because, on the birth of Jesus Christ, true justice began to come down from heaven, and man began to be justified by faith in Christ; as also, He came down to them to proclaim His love given for the sake of their salvation

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- God pours out His *truth* and *righteousness*
- They seem to spring forth from creation itself
- One result of the reconciliation of God's mercy and truth shall be a growth of righteousness among men
- Prophetically, this refers not only to the reconciliation started at the cross, but also has in view its completion at the end of the age, when “*creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*” (Romans 8:21)

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- St. Augustine comments on *Truth shall spring out of the earth* and says, “Christ is born of a woman. The Son of God has come forth of the flesh. What is truth? The Son of God. What is the earth? Flesh. Ask whence Christ was born, and you see that “Truth is sprung out of the earth.” But the Truth which sprang out of the earth was before the earth, and by It the heaven and the earth were made: but in order that righteousness might look down from heaven, that is, in order that men might be justified by Divine grace, Truth was born of the Virgin Mary; that He might be able to offer a sacrifice to justify them, the sacrifice of suffering, the sacrifice of the Cross.”

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- According to St. Augustine: Earth is also the believer, who has been earth because of the sin; but through his belief in the Lord Christ, truth has sprung out in him; And instead of falling under the punishment of sin, he enjoys the new life, liberated from sin
- He says, “On the same passage we may mention another meaning. ‘Truth is sprung out of the earth:’ confession from man... How does truth spring from you, whilst you are a sinner, whilst you are unrighteous? Confess your sins, and truth shall spring out of you.”

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- *the LORD will give what is good*, He will shower blessings, both spiritual and temporal
- Being Himself pure goodness, He will readily return from His wrath, and *give what is good* to His repenting people
- The effects of the incarnation of Christ, the descent of the Spirit, and of the Good News of the gospel among men, are here set forth in Scripture under images borrowed from that fruitfulness caused in the earth by the rain of heaven
- God will not withhold any good thing from His people; every good and perfect gift comes from Him

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- Some say that the psalmist here in verse 12 still talks about the mystery of the Incarnation, showing that truth could spring out of the earth; not in the manner of the seed that we sow and cultivate, but in the manner of the natural flowers that grow spontaneously, with no other culture than the beams of the sun, and the rains of heaven
- *the LORD will give what is good*, He will send His Holy Spirit from heaven, who will overshadow a virgin, and thus our land, which was never cultivated nor sown, and was altogether an untouched virgin, will yield her fruit

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- *Righteousness will go before Him*, Christ shall work and fulfil all righteousness
- He shall satisfy and glorify the righteousness of God, and shall progress the practice of righteousness and holiness among men
- *And shall make His footsteps our pathway*, He shall enable us to walk in those righteous ways wherein He walked, and which He has set to us
- According to St. Augustine, the righteousness will go before Him, Repentance will prepare our footsteps, led by God Himself

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- *Righteousness will go before Him*, This verse personifies righteousness, presenting it as a person who goes before God, preparing the way for God's steps
- God's *righteousness* is so rich that it also makes *His footsteps our pathway* – the pathway of His people
- *shall make his footsteps* a way (to walk in); so that His people may follow without hindrance or difficulties
- Christ, the sun of righteousness, shall bring us to God, and put us into the way that leads to Him

Confidence in God's Response

85:8-13



- St. John the Baptist, the forerunner, shall go before Christ to prepare His way
- St. John the Baptist was not only to prepare the way of Christ by his doctrine and baptism, but to guide the feet of the people into the way of peace
- Or to direct them to believe in Christ, and to be His followers
- He called Him the Lamb of God
- He proclaimed *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*
For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:
‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’” (Matthew 3:2-3; see Isaiah 40:3-5)



Discussion

- What mercies had the Lord granted His people in the past?
- For what reason did the Psalm writer recall God's faithfulness in the past?
- What request did the Psalmist present to the Lord? (85:4-7)
- What promises does God offer His people?



Discussion

- How should God's people respond to His faithfulness?
- What mercies did the psalmist expect to receive from the Lord?
- What picture did the psalmist give of God's gracious treatment of His people?
- What does this Psalm tell us about God's character?

Discussion



- What picture of Jesus' Person and work do you see in verse 10?
- What kind of relationship does the Lord want to have with us?
- To whom does the Lord draw near?
- In what spirit does the psalmist end the Psalm? How did he begin the Psalm?