



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 86

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *A Prayer of David*
- The title attributes this Psalm to David; all the versions of translation agree on this
- The occasion on which it was composed is unknown because there are too many possible times where this could connect with his general circumstances
- But it has been commonly supposed it was written by David, when in distress, and his life was sought after, very likely when he was persecuted by Saul, and fled from him



Introduction

- This Psalm is distinguished by the seven times repeated use of the Hebrew word *Adonai*, 'Lord,' or 'Master' in addressing God
- *Adonai* expresses the mindfulness of specially belonging to God, of standing under His immediate guidance and protection
- The Psalm is made up of earnest prayers, with reasons why those prayers should be answered
- It is a very suitable prayer for a person striving under affliction from persecution or injustice
- However, while the psalmist finds himself in a difficult situation, he remains confident that God hears and is able to save him



Introduction

- He is sure that even though his situation is dreadful, his God is bigger and desires to show mercy to those whom He loves
- In this Psalm David uses a distinct structure to show what's central to his thinking
- The Psalm starts and ends with references to his situation and his requests for salvation
- The center sections of the Psalm are completely focused on God and David's devotion to God
- Psalm 86 is the only Psalm of David in Book 3 of the Psalms
- Book 3 includes Psalms 73 through 89



Introduction

- It is a Messianic Psalm
- The Jews used to sing this Psalm in “Yom Kippur”, being the great day of Atonement, for the sake of the whole people, as well as for that of every believer
- Psalm 86 is a very in-depth lesson on prayer where David offered supplication, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise
- It is one of the Sixth Hour Prayer Psalms



Introduction

The Psalm Outline

- A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7
- Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10
- A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13
- A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- The first five verses are a series of petitions, each supported by the foundation on which the psalmist pleads for a hearing
- David used expressive language to speak of his need and figuratively is asking God in heaven to bow His head to earth to hear David's plea for help
- This image captures the humble position of David and the high position of God, and shows the attentiveness of the Almighty to the cries of His people
- As if he is saying, "Incline *Your ear*, for You sit so high, You have need to do so, in order to hear me, who lie so low, 'for I am needy and poor.' As I am the beggar sitting at the rich man's gate, incline Your ear to Your poor servant, and hear him."

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- *For I am poor and needy*, This was the first of several reasons *why* God should answer the request of bowing down
- By the poor and the needy he means the person, who, though he may abound in the riches of the world, still does not put his trust in them, takes no pride in them, does not despise others, but rather despises the wealth itself; and does not look upon himself greater than those who are not possessed of such wealth
- David depended entirely on God, in Whom he had placed his entire hope, his strength, and his riches, and without Whom he knew he was nothing, and could do nothing; he, therefore, with great truth, proclaimed himself really *poor and needy*

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- David here appealed to God's sympathy, to His compassion
- It is significant that David *began* his plea with this
- His understanding of the love and compassion of God was foundational
- A hard-hearted God would not care for a *poor and needy* man
- But David knew that God was full of love and compassion and would be moved by the fact that David was, and knew himself to be, *poor and needy*
- Moreover, it may be taken in a spiritual sense; all men are poor and needy

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- Good men are *poor* in spirit, are aware of their spiritual poverty, and ask the Lord for the supply of their need
- David was not afraid to be humble, as some people are sometimes
- To confess that we are poor and needy seems demeaning and to be a servant seems unworthy
- According to St. Augustine, it is our Lord Jesus Christ Who prays for us, Who prays in us, and is to be prayed to by us
- He prays for us, as our High Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God
- He says, “Let us then recognize our own words in Him, and His words in us.”

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- St. Augustine continues and says, “He bows down the ear, if you lift not up your neck. For He draws near to the holy, but departs far from the uplifted, save those humble, whom He has Himself lifted up. It is not to the rich, but to the *poor and needy*, to the humble penitent, confessing his sin, and needing mercy, not to him who is full and haughty, who boasts, as in want of nothing, and says, ‘I thank You, that I am not as this publican.’”
- In verse 2 He tells in what respect he wishes to be heard, *Preserve my life*
- He felt that without God’s help he could perish

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- David was often remarkably preserved by the Lord from all attempts upon him
- The Lord is not only the preserver of the lives of men in a temporal sense, but He is the preserver of the souls of His people
- God keeps His people from the evil of sin, and preserves them safe to His kingdom and glory
- *Preserve my life* that so many enemies lie in wait for, in my exile
- *for I am holy*: This was not a claim to absolute holiness
- David knew he was a sinner; that he had and would sin
- David was *holy* in the sense that he faithfully followed God's laws, not in the sense that he was perfect

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- He is aware that it is not in his power alone to remain holy and so he asks God to preserve him
- St. Augustine says, “when one feels a confidence that he has been justified through the sacraments, and calls himself holy, through the grace of God; such is not to be looked upon as the pride of a vain man, but the confession of one who is not ungrateful; but if one cannot venture to say, I am justified and cleansed, he can at least say, ‘I am holy;’ that is, I am one of the faithful, a professor of our holy faith and religion, dedicated and consecrated to God through baptism.”

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- It is not the pride of self-righteousness, but the confession of gratitude
- David emphasizes his relationship to God as His servant
- He doesn't see God as a distant unreachable figure, but as his Lord who will care for those who are His own
- *trusts in You*, He trusts only in God and does not go anywhere else for protection
- He relies on no one else and look to God alone, and he does this with complete confidence
- A man who does this has a right to look to God for protection, and to expect that God will intervene on his behalf

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- When David came to the throne of God, he came with careful thought and based this plea on three similar ideas, all rooted in the fact that he was connected to God
- He embraces God's holiness in his own life; is connected to God with worship, *You are my God*, and is connected to God in trust and faith, *trusts in You*
- *Be merciful to me*, David asked for mercy because he was completely dependent upon God
- It was mercy after all that he relied on, and not justice
- He cried to God *all day long* because he could not or would not rely on anyone else for help

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- It was not because he had any claim on the ground that he was *holy*, but all that he had and hoped for was to be traced to the mercy of God
- It is a confession that he is a sinner, and in need of the forgiveness of his sins
- With boldness and trust in the work of God, he cries all day long without despair
- According to St. Augustine, the church, being the body of Christ, cries as one man *all day* continually to the end of the world
- Our One Head intercedes for us before the Father

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- David felt that he could only find joy in his soul as God met his need
- The prayer rises from mere petitions for relief and recovery from a state of suffering, into an earnest appeal for that which the heart of man is ever longing for and seeking after - gladness and joy
- It is God only that can put gladness into the heart, and make the soul rejoice
- And there is no more likely way of attaining to spiritual joy than to be always *lifting up* the *soul* to God

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- Whoever truly, and from his heart, loves God, by obeying His commandments, thinking on Him and longing for Him, lifts up his soul to God
- While, on the contrary, whoever loves the earth, by thinking on and desiring the things of the earth, lets his soul down to its level
- It is He Who was said, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death*, (Matthew 26:38) that utters this petition, that His Father may *rejoice*
- Christ *lifted up* His eyes, and His heart and soul, to His divine Father; (John 17:1) and also made His soul an offering for sin, and at death committed His spirit into His hands, (Luke 23:47)

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- A reason for having raised up his soul to God in order to obtain consolation; because God is *good, and ready to forgive*
- David based this plea on the graciousness of God, knowing that He is *good and ready to forgive*
- Many wait to repent and ask forgiveness because they think that *time* might make God *more* forgiving
- But He is ready to forgive *now*
- As David called upon God for help, he expected *abundant mercy* from God
- This expectation spoken in faith would be answered

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- St. Augustine observes that God's mildness is most remarkable in bearing with us when we pray; when, during our prayers, we divert our attention to so many different subjects
- God listens to our prayers, however unskillfully worded, and broken by wandering thoughts
- God is also *abundant in mercy*, "*For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*" (Romans 10:13)
- If He sometimes does not hear or have mercy on those who pray to Him, the reason is because they do not really call upon Him, or do not call upon Him as they ought
- He very often hears us, but at the fitting time

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- *Give ear, O LORD*, He repeats and multiplies his requests, both to ease his own troubled mind, and prevail with God, who is well pleased with His people's persistence in prayer, Luke 18:1
- He repeats it in order to express his great desire for what he asks
- He was confident that if the loving, merciful God heard his plea, He would answer favorably
- *attend to the voice of my supplications*, Which proceeded from the spirit of grace and offered in a humble manner, depending on the mercy of God
- David was deeply sincere and intense in his prayer

A Humble Plea to the God Who Hears His People 86:1-7



- *In the day of my trouble I will call upon You*, This demonstrates David's wonderful confidence in God
- He knew that God could be counted on even in the *day of trouble*
- The language implies a dependency that in all times of trouble he would make God his refuge which was now the ground of his confidence
- The Psalm may be taken as the prayer of Christ in His Passion on behalf of His whole Church, for He says Himself, "*And I know that You always hear Me.*" (John 11:42)

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- David's understanding of who God is in this Psalm – listening, holy, worthy of trust, merciful, good, ready to forgive – stands in contrast to the understanding of many of the pagan gods
- David compares his own condition with that of those who worship false gods
- He had a God who could hear; they had none
- He gives a reason for flying to God alone, for appealing to Him, and for seeking to lift up his soul to Him, because there is no one, among gods, like God

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- No one is like Him either in essence or in power, or in wisdom, or in goodness
- *gods* are false gods, idols, and demons, of which it is said in Psalm 96:6, *“For all the gods of the peoples are idols”*
- According to St. Augustine, the Psalmist here, rebukes the heathens, who worship idols, “What did he say? ‘Among the gods,’ Let the Pagans make for themselves what gods they will; let them bring workmen in silver and in gold, furbishers, sculptors; let them make gods. What kind of gods? Having eyes, and seeing not ... But we do not worship these, he says; we do not worship them, these are symbols. What then do they worship? Something else that is worse: for the gods of the gentiles are devils.”

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- These words of this verse form the fitting reply to the insulting message of Rabshakeh: *“Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, “The LORD will deliver us. Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? ... Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”* (Isaiah 36:18-19)
- Not only is there no god like God, but none of them have produced any one work equal to any of His

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- For God made the heavens, and the earth, and everything in them, from nothing
- But there is nothing these false gods have done which can be a ground of confidence that can be compared with what God has done
- As we read in Deuteronomy 3:24, *“O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?”*
- Verse 9 is remarkable for the clarity and fulness of its Messianic hope

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- The time is coming when all the nations of the earth shall acknowledge it, and, forsaking their powerless idol, shall worship God alone
- This clearly proves that no God is like the Lord and no works like His
- St. Augustine says, “He has announced the Church: ‘All nations.’ If there is any nation which God has not made, it will not worship Him: but there is no nation which God has not made; because God made Adam and Eve, the source of all nations, thus all nations sprang.”

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- The worship of false gods and idols will one day cease, and their falsity and vanity be made perfectly clear
- While the worship of our God will be everlasting, a fact partly accomplished in the Church of Christ, and fully so on the day of judgment
- After the ascension of Christ, idolatry began to disappear, and the worship of the true God to be introduced among all nations
- But, on the day of judgment, all men, without any exception, shall know that the gods of the gentiles were demons and whether they will or will not, every knee shall bow before the Lord

Trust & Confidence in God's Character 86:8-10



- David understood that the LORD was not one God among many gods, or even the best God among many gods
- He *alone* is *God*, and none other
- David provide the reason why the worship of false gods will cease, and all nations will worship and glorify the Lord, *for He is God alone*, truly great, and does *wondrous things* that nobody else can do
- When one is really aware and mindful of who God is then it should enable him/her to pray with boldness

A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13



- Because David knew who God is, his natural reaction was to submit himself to this great, gracious God and to ask Him to *teach* him
- This shows that David understood that this amazing God cared for him
- This same great God, whom all nations will worship and glorify, will hear the plea from one *poor and needy* man who asks, *Teach me Your way, O LORD*
- He is asking God to teach him not only by enlightening his mind, but by moving his will; and thus, *will walk in Your truth*

A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13



- *in Your truth*, In Christ who is the Truth itself, and the true way to eternal life
- To walk in Him is to walk by faith in Him, in hope of eternal happiness through Him
- David is seeking consolation not for consolation's sake, but in order that, being refreshed by it, as if with food, he may persevere in His Holy fear
- David knew he could only walk in God's truth with a *united heart*
- A divided heart – divided among different loyalties and different deities – could never walk in God's truth

A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13



- *Unite my heart*, make it so whole and undivided that it may entirely love and fear God not partly fear Him and partly fear the world
- God unites the heart of the whole Church too by granting it unity of faith towards God and of love towards brethren
- Now in verse 12, David adds thanksgiving to prayer, for nothing tends more to obtain new favors than to appear mindful of and grateful for the past
- Even in the midst of difficulties David is focused on the character of God and he is keen to give thanks and praise to God – trusting that He will hear and save him

A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13



- *with all my heart*, This is but carrying out the idea in the previous verse
- He would give his whole heart to God
- He would allow nothing to divide or distract his affections
- He would withhold nothing from God
- David *will glorify* God not merely in the present difficult time, but he will do it *forevermore*
- He would in all cases, and at all times - in this world and in the world to come - honor God
- The merciful God who rescued him before, would rescue him again, *For great is Your mercy toward me*

A Commitment to Obedience and Worship 86:11-13



- *For great is Your mercy toward me*, Both in things temporal and spiritual
- *You have delivered*, From a very distressed and miserable condition, under a deep sense of sin, and a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God, as, particularly, when he was charged by Nathan
- Or from hell itself, from the second and eternal death, which every man is deserving of, and are only delivered from by the grace of God, and blood of Christ
- This shows the sense the psalmist had of the just accountability of sin, and his thankfulness for deliverance from it

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- In many ways verses 14-17 mirror 1-7
- After offering praises and thanks, David comes again to pray, asking to be delivered from the multitude of the enemies that sought his life
- He is crying out for help, but he is confident in God and His ability to save him
- David lived such a long life of danger that we can't precisely place this event in his life
- It could have come at several points but obviously, the danger was clear and real

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- While some think David refers to his own enemies, some think he refers to the enemies of Christ, the secret council of the priests and pharisees, followed by the cries of the multitude for the Crucifixion of the Lord
- The explanation of St. Augustine is more in accordance with the rest of the Psalm; and he says it is to be understood of the members of Christ's body of the just, or any person suffering persecution from their spiritual enemies
- The man of God, then, delivered through the grace of Christ from the lower hell, fighting in the meantime with his spiritual enemies, in heavy groans cries, *O God, the proud have risen against me*

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- They are not few in number, nor weak in strength, but *a mob of violent men* a great congregation of most powerful enemies *have sought my life* to destroy it
- And in their blindness and irrationality *have not set You before them* have not considered that You are the protector of the just, and they presume to fight war, not with weak mortals, but with the Lord God of hosts
- For David it was clear that *Proud men, violent mobs*, are not surrendered to God
- With his proud and merciless enemies he contrasts in verse 15 the revealed character of God, as the ground of the prayer

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Having mentioned the quantity and the quality of his enemies, he now asks for help against them, and in various terms proclaims God's goodness, to show he was not foolish in hoping for assistance from so good a God *full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth*
- God had declared that He is *"merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,"* (Exodus 34:6-7)
- He could not, therefore, abandon the psalmist in his need

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Some scholars say that David explains why God permitted them to rise against Christ, and to deliver Him over to death
- This was of God's great mercy, Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, so that the passion of Christ was a work of great *compassion and mercy*
- And the Son also is here referred to, as voluntarily giving Himself as a sacrifice for us, according to His most true promise;
- He Who was *longsuffering*, in that He bore so much for us *abundant in mercy* because He came to save, *and truth* because He taught the Truth, even His enemies acknowledged, saying, "*You are true, and teach the way of God in truth.*" Matthew 22:16

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Because of all the attributes of God counted in the previous verse, He is now called on to show His saving power
- And the commentators, almost all, agree in explaining this passage of the prayer of Christ for His Resurrection
- He asks for His Father's protection, *turn to me*
- In saying, *Have mercy upon Me*, He asks for deliverance from misery
- *the son of Your maidservant*, Jesus Christ who was born of a pure Virgin who answered the Angel's message with, "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord!*" Luke 1:48

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Relating it to David, God had for a time turned His face away from his servant; now He is entreated to turn it towards him, and, as a consequence, to *have mercy on* him and deliver him
- Through it all, David never approached God on the basis of what he deserved
- Anything he received from God, he would receive on the basis of *mercy*
- Only in God's strength can we effectively struggle or strive against either our spiritual or our temporal enemies
- Here, the fathers distinguish between the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son, and the believers, the children of God by adoption

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Each of His members too, can utter this prayer, who is God's *servant* and *child* because of adoption and obedience, who is the *son of His handmaid*, the Church
- The children of God by adoption enjoy the strength of God through the free divine grace
- The strength we get is a free gift, not out of our own worthiness
- He concludes by asking for some external sign that may let even his enemies see that God always consoles and assists his faithful servants

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- He is asking not only a *sign* by which he might know that his sins were forgiven he should be saved; but one visible to others, even to his enemies, by which they might know that God was on his side, and would verily do him good
- A question has been raised, what is the sign he asks for? St. Jerome says, it is the sign of the cross of Christ, for it is a token for good, it being the token of redemption, and when the evil spirits, who hate us, see it, they are *ashamed*
- St. Augustine explains it of the sign that will appear on the last day, which will be for good to the elect, and on the sight of which all their enemies will be *ashamed*

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- Others interpret it of the sign given by Isaiah 7:14, to King Ahaz when he said to him, *“the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son.”*
- That was truly a token for good to David, to have the Messiah descended from him, and to the whole world that was to be delivered, through Christ, from all its enemies
- Perhaps, the *sign for good* means that spiritual joy, which he asked for in the beginning of the Psalm, when he said, *Rejoice the soul of Your servant*
- For such joy to a holy soul in tribulation is the clearest sign of the grace of God

A Humble, Confident Cry for Help 86:14-17



- The meaning would be, give me the grace of that spiritual joy that will appear externally on me so, *those who hate me may see* such peace and serenity of soul, and *be ashamed*
- For *You, Lord, have helped me* in the struggle, comforted me in my sorrow, and have already changed my sadness into inner joy and gladness
- David's deliverance would be his enemies' *shame*; it would show that God was on his side, and against them
- Once again David bases his current expectation on God's prior help
- Every past experience of God's goodness to us is a promise of His continued blessing

Discussion



- What troubles was David having when he wrote this Psalm?
- When David addresses God, what different words does he use for God?
- What specific requests does he make of God? What is the essence of his request?
- What “God-related” reasons does he mention for why God should help him?



Discussion

- What specific blessings did David ask of the Lord?
- What attitude did David have toward himself?
- How did David demonstrate his dependence on God?
- What does this Psalm reveal about the kind of relationship David had with the Lord?
- To whom does the Lord show His mercy?



Discussion

- Why did David believe the Lord would answer his prayer?
- What did David mean when he asked the Lord to give him an undivided heart?
- How did David compare the Lord to other gods?
- What did David expect to be the result of God's work in him?
- What does this Psalm tell us about God's character?