



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 112

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Introduction

- This Psalm has no title
- This is another one of the acrostic or alphabetical Psalms like Psalm 111
- It is formed exactly as Psalm 111 in the division of its verses
- It has ten verses with twenty-two lines each of which begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet
- Some believe the author is David
- However, some believe that it has been written after the captivity, and probably by Zechariah and Haggai because the title in the Latin Vulgate ascribed it to them



Introduction

- Haggai and Zechariah were Prophets, who, after the carrying away to Babylon, returned to Jerusalem in the time of King Darius, long after those words Psalm 111 were sung; and when they saw the Temple restored, offered heartfelt praises to God with great joy
- While Psalm 111 declares the glory of God, Psalm 112 speaks of the reflection of the divine light in men who are born from above
- God is here praised for the manifestation of His glory which is seen in His people, just as in the preceding Psalm He was magnified for His own personal acts



Introduction

- Psalm 111 ends with *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*
- Psalm 112 takes up that theme and begins with *Blessed is the man who fears the Lord* (112:1)
- According to St. John Chrysostom, the first verse of this Psalm comes as a fulfilment of the end of the last one; as though they are one and the same Psalm
- Just like Psalm 111, Psalm 112 begin with *Praise the Lord*
- This Psalm carries much similarities to the Book of Proverbs



Introduction

- Therefore, this Psalm is one of the Psalms that concern wisdom
- It presents a comparison between a wise man who fears the Lord, and the wicked man who has no peace
- A Christian ought to sing it with perfect readiness after the absolution of his sins
- The Coptic Church prays this Psalm in the Ninth Hour of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3
- The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8
- The Envy of the Wicked 112:9-10

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- Like other Alleluia Psalms, this one begins with, Alleluia, *Praise the Lord!*
- This was both the personal praise of the psalmist and an exhortation to others to praise Him
- The closing thought of Psalm 111, is taken up and expanded in Psalm 112
- In order to encourage all to lead a holy life, the psalmist proves, by various arguments, the happiness of him who fears the Lord
- But as it is not every sort of fear that makes a man happy, he adds, in explanation, *Who delights greatly in His commandments*

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- St. James tells us that, “*Even the demons believe—and tremble!*” (James 2:19)
- The psalmist immediately explains what this fear consists in
- Only those who take the greatest delight in fulfilling His commandments, for *delights greatly in His commandments* means nothing more than to love them exceedingly, to be attached to them, and to find a pleasure in observing them
- In a word, happy is he who has a holy interior fear of God, with an exterior readiness to obey His commandments, and is, thus, truly wise and holy

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- There is enough in that fear, which St. John Chrysostom calls the golden gate of happiness, to make a man blessed, not indeed with the pleasure that belongs to this world
- But with such a measure of gladness as befits pilgrims in the way
- And there are two distinct stages of progress set before us, that fear of the Lord which causes men to reverence and observe His negative law, by abstaining from sins which He has forbidden
- And then that higher obedience which consists in carrying out with loving zeal His positive commands, that learning to do well which follows ceasing to do evil

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- St. John Chrysostom summarizes the meaning and says, “Unless they give evidence of the same virtue, what defense or excuse could they offer for not seeking it with the same yearning? For this very reason this inspired author also said, he will *delights greatly in His commandments*: the one who fears Him as he should receives His commands with deep yearning. Hence love for the lawgiver renders the law kindly.”
- Eusebius, pointing out that the expression fear God is often used in Scripture to signify the imperfect worship paid to Him by Gentiles inexperienced in the Law, argues thence that the Christian Church, as made up chiefly of Gentiles, is here intended, and its zeal in God’s commandments contrasted with Hebrew indifference

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- Some scholars say *the man who fears the Lord*, points to Christ, the type and example of all His saints
- No one revered God the Father as Jesus did; no one delighted in the Father's commandments as much as Jesus did
- The one who *fears the Lord* and *delights greatly in His commandments* has God's blessing on his family
- The psalmist pronounced blessing on the *descendants* of this man, the one who is *upright*
- *mighty on earth*, They shall be prospered; honored; distinguished among people: distinguished for their success in life

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- This refers to what was regarded among the Jews as of great desire, and in accordance with the promises found in Holy Scriptures Psalm 25:13,37:25-26; Genesis 12:2,17:6; Exodus 20:6
- There is more promised here than that fruitfulness to which the Jew looked as among the best of blessings
- *mighty on earth* not in a literal sense, but in a spiritual sense, of their being strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might
- What inheritance would we give to our *descendants* , greater than our rejoice in God's commandments and of our living practical faith

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- It also points to spiritual increase of converts and disciples for the teachers of righteousness; increase in good works on the part of these disciples themselves, if they lay to heart the lessons of their teachers
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Scripture is frequently in the habit of calling offspring not what is born in the order of nature but in fellowship of virtue.”
- He whose delights in willingly obeying God’s commandments, is worthy to become the father of saints, as St. Paul was of Timothy, Luke, Titus, and many more

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- *mighty* even here upon earth in the strife against evil, blessed in their results; but mightier in the land of the living, more blessed when those words are spoken, “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you,*” (Matthew 25:34)
- And St. John Chrysostom responds to the reason of saying *on earth* explaining that to show that if such is its might on earth, just imagine how much more would be the might of those who enjoy heaven
- Then in verse 3, the psalmist also pronounced a blessing on the economic life of the one who fears the Lord

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- It is the second blessing, an abundance of honor and wealth, which, however, do not lead to sin or influence negatively their godly life
- We may read these words literally of abundant wealth bestowed on the righteous by God, and used, not for pride and luxury, but for continual works of mercy
- He will have his mind quite uncorrupted by such blessings, for *his righteousness endures forever*
- But the higher meaning is the true spiritual riches which are stored up for the poor in spirit, often most needy in the prosperity of the world

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- And we may come at the truest sense by comparing the words of the Apostle describes his own condition, *“as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”* (2 Corinthians 6:10)
- This blessing is to be understood of interior glory, and the testimony of a good conscience, and the riches of faith, and that gain of which St. Paul speaks when he says, *“Now godliness with contentment is great gain;”* (1 Timothy 6:6)
- When the soul is content with its position in life, then the blessing, becomes continuous; for it is the soul that ought to be rich

The Blessed Man and His Family 112:1-3



- For who can be richer than he who is heir of God?
- If we take the Man to be Christ, then the Church is that *house* of His wherein spiritual riches are stored
- If we take it of any faithful servant, then his heart is the dwelling or *house* wherein as in an earthen vessel, he stores this treasure, his righteousness, because it is God's free gift to him
- God will make the heart of those who fear Him His dwelling place where He pours in it the riches of His grace and divine gifts
- He who fear God, will enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- The third blessing enjoyed by those who fear God is the light of prudence and counsel that shines from heaven on them in their difficulties, to support them in the trials and troubles of life
- The psalmist recognized the *darkness* that often fills the world, but the *upright* one who fears the Lord will be blessed with *light* in the midst of the darkness
- The relationship of God to the godly person is like the relationship of the sun to the moon
- The sun shines by its own glorious light
- The moon does not, but still it shines, and the way it shines is by reflecting the light coming to it from the sun

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- The godly are not left without guidance here amidst the confusions and dangers of the world, when things are gloomy and doubtful, then comes a ray of light from God, to show them the path wherein they must walk to be in safety
- A light to cheer and encourage them in trouble
- The highest sense of the words is the revelation of Christ to the world, a light shining in the dark places of the earth, on them who were setting in the shadow of death, and that light Himself, *gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous*
- He comes still, in continual Advents, arising in the dark hearts of men as the Son of Righteousness, so that they who were sometime darkness are now light in the Lord

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- The fourth blessing consists in that spiritual joy that resides in the heart of those that fear God
- *A good man deals graciously*, Those who fear God easily forgive any offense, because they show mercy to human weakness
- They also readily lend to those who need it, and thus comply with that law of the Lord's, *"Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you."* (Luke 6:37-38)
- The one who fears the Lord is blessed with wisdom (Psalm 111:10) that flows from his godly character
- He has the means to show favor to others, and he is willing to do this and hoping for nothing to gain

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- In the parable of the unjust steward, the expression appears according to which we must do good with “unjust money”
- From there arises the question: are money and wealth unjust in themselves, or what does the Lord wish to say?
- St. Clement of Alexandria explains this parable very well in his homily “What rich man can be saved?”, and he states: Jesus “declares unjust by nature any possession one has for oneself as one’s own good and does not make it available for those who need it; rather, he declares that from this injustice it is possible to accomplish a just and praiseworthy work, giving relief to one of those little ones who have an eternal dwelling-place near the Father.”

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- It is the characteristic of a good man - of a heart that is truly sincere and godly- to do good to others and to assist them in their endeavor to secure happiness in the world to come
- The heart of this faithful to the divine Word consists in a fundamental choice of charity towards the poor and needy
- A good man is not only a man that has the good work of grace in him, and is ready to every good work; but one that is generous, bountiful, and liberal
- *guide his affairs with discretion*, of his just management of his wealth, regarding himself merely as God's steward

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- And assigning to each person a fair proportion of that riches, so as not to waste it by thoughtless abundance on the one hand, nor to display narrow ungenerousness on the other
- It may also mean *with judgment*; so as God requires, not getting his wealth unjustly, nor casting it away wickedly, nor yet withholding it uncharitably from such as need it
- St. Augustine, noting that almsgiving is mentioned in a later verse prefers to understand this verse of the free forgiveness of injustice or offences, which as we learn from the Our Father, is a kind of spiritual alms

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- The sixth blessing of the person fearing God is, that he will always live in the memory of man, not by reason of his crimes, as do Judas and Cain, Herod and Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas
- His memory will be a glorious one, and all the church of the saints shall declare his praises as we read in Hebrews 2:12, *“I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”*
- God's blessing shall abide with him, and make his happiness sure and stable
- Because he is a wise counsellor and a generous giver, his memory shall be praised and lasting amongst his people

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- He will be *in everlasting remembrance* among men; and his name, too, will be written in the book of life, never to be blotted out, and thus really and truly he will be *in everlasting remembrance* with the Angels in heaven
- We may take the words also to be of Christ's Body the Church, unshaken through the ages, always, day by day, making memorial of Him, the Righteous One, and commemorating in her services His great saints
- His *remembrance* will last, with nothing to fear from *evil tidings*
- As he trusts in the Lord, *his heart is established* and in the end, he will see victory over his enemies

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- *Evil tidings* are all around us, and come to us every day; yet the one who fears the Lord *will not be afraid*
- He will not fear the slanders and rebukes of the wicked, nor will he fear that frightful sentence of the eternal Judge, “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire*” (Matthew 25:41) —*His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord*
- This is the seventh blessing of the soul that fears God; a firm and fixed confidence on the divine protection, through which it fears no evil
- St. John Chrysostom says, “he did not say that he would not hear an evil account, but that on hearing it he would have no fear.”

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- The story of Job, when the messengers of evil succeeded one another so fast, is an illustration of the truth of this verse
- *His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord*, That is, in every adversity, in every imminent danger, his heart is ready to take refuge in God, because he is always prepared and ready to hope in God, never loses sight of God's assistance, never distrusts Him, never hesitates in putting faith in Him
- Verse 8 is almost a repetition of verse 7, to emphasize the point
- His heart is strengthened in such confidence, so that there is no danger of his failing in it

The Comparison Between the Upright and the Wicked 112:4-8



- He never will have the slightest fear of any coming danger from his enemies and, of course, much less when he shall look down upon them powerless and defeated
- And observe that *until*, here as elsewhere, does not imply that he will begin to fear after his enemies have been defeated, but rather his everlasting protection from fear
- According to St. John Chrysostom, *his enemies*, is the wicked demons and the devil himself

The Envy of the Wicked

112:9-10



- The eighth blessing consists in making good use of riches, for it is through God's grace that God's friends learn the wisdom of transferring their treasures, by means of alms, to heaven, "*where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.*" (Matthew 6:19)
- He is also wise; *dispersed* implies a wise and thoughtful distribution as part of the *discretion* that guides his affairs (Psalm 112:5)
- St. Paul quoted Psalm 112:9 in 2 Corinthians 9:9 to encourage Christians to be generous: "*As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.'*"

The Envy of the Wicked

112:9-10



- He will have his reward, not only in the world to come, but even in this world he will have an increase of power and glory, signified in the Scriptures by his horn
- One's horn is said to be exalted when he becomes stronger and more powerful; and to *be exalted with honor* means for one to become not only strong and powerful, but also full of glory
- This verse, then, gives us to understand that alms, instead of hurting or lessening anyone in their means, only tends to increase their riches, power, and glory, many examples of which are to be found in the Scriptures, especially in Job and Tobit

The Envy of the Wicked

112:9-10



- In close connection with Psalm 111, this man has indeed become like the God Whom he fears and obeys
- The very things celebrated in the praise of God are those which establish the merits and qualities of this man who fears Him
- The last blessing is, that the person fearing God will overcome all envy
- In contrast to the enduring blessing upon the upright man, the wicked man will *melt away*
- His misery will be all the worse as his *desire* is frustrated and he sees the blessings that come to those who fear the Lord

The Envy of the Wicked

112:9-10



- *The wicked will see* the good works of God's servant, and his happiness and are naturally *grieved* to see them prosper
- They shall reflect on the good works of the just, and their happiness, and will be tormented with envy and anger
- *The wicked* like a mad dog he shall *gnash his teeth* and *melt away* in grief
- But, meanwhile, his *desire* in looking for the destruction of the just, will not be granted, but the wicked himself shall speedily *perish*
- Church Fathers take the *wicked* here to be Satan, in his powerless rage at seeing the triumph of the saints

The Envy of the Wicked

112:9-10



- Blessed and happy, then, is he that fears the Lord, wretched and miserable is he who does not
- St. John Chrysostom says, “What is the meaning of *The desire of the wicked shall perish*? It does not survive in any fashion, he is saying: since the kinds of things they lust after are passing and temporary, lust also imitates these realities in fading and perishing and having no roots. Now, if such is the fate of the sinner in this life, consider what it will be like in the life to come.”

Discussion



- How does the first verse introduce the theme of the Psalm?
- What does it mean to be blessed?
- What does it mean to fear the Lord and how does this relate to delighting in God's commandments? How does fearing the Lord direct us away from pursuing self-centered versions of the good life and direct us toward reflecting God's image?

Discussion



- In what ways does Psalm 112 call us to be a generous people and how does this counter the consumeristic message of over consumption and the belief that our identity is grounded in what we buy or own?
- How does fearing and trusting the Lord affect the way we walk through trials and hardships? How is it that even bad news can be embraced with a heartfelt faith in the Lord?
- What does this Psalm tell us about the advantages of having faith in God?