



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 114

Metropolitan Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm has no title
- As to the author of this Psalm, there have been various opinions
- Some believe that this Psalm was originally written at the site of the River Jordan, at the Gilgal, after the crossing over of the children of Israel to the promised land
- According to others, it was written to honor the three young men in the furnace of fire in Babylon; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego
- And some believe, it was written to honor Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai

Introduction



- They believe that in the story of Queen Esther and Mordecai God did glorious wonders with His children, both on the personal level, or on that of the whole people
- Psalm 114 is the second in the series of Psalms known as the Egyptian Hallel and sung as part of Israel's Passover ceremony (Psalms 113-118)
- The subject matter of this Psalm belongs to the period of the Return and focuses on the reason for praise by summarizing Israel's redemption story
- That return might be Israel's Exodus from the oppression of the Egyptians



Introduction

- It contains a short account of that deliverance by which God, in bringing His people out of Egypt: and leading them to the promised inheritance, gave a proof of His power and grace which ought to be held in everlasting remembrance
- Or that return might be the deliverance of Israel from Babylon as a second Exodus, a new birth of the nation
- At such a time it was natural to dwell on the great memories of the past as an encouragement for the present and the future
- The Exodus or return celebrated by the psalmist becomes, therefore, the symbol of another

Introduction



- Since the subject matter of it is the return of the children of Israel, it is typical of our spiritual redemption by Christ
- This Psalm presents to us a magnificent and joyful portrait of the exodus of the people of Israel, as a symbol of the exodus of humanity out of the bondage of the real Pharaoh, namely, the devil
- This Psalm proceeds the reading of the Gospel of the Liturgy of Blessing of the Water of the Theophany to proclaim God's authority over the water
- It is a Psalm of praise without the usual invitation to praise

Introduction



Psalm Outline

- God, the Mighty Leader 114: 1-4
- Nature Submission to God 114:5-8

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- Verses 1 & 2, When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He separated them from all other nations to be a holy people over which He Himself planned to rule
- The Psalm opens by recalling the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian oppression until its entry into that Promised Land which is God's *sanctuary*; that is, the place of His presence in the midst of His people
- In these two verses the psalmist moves from Egypt to the Promised Land, from God's supposed absence to God's obvious presence

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- Israel's deliverance from *Egypt* was the central act of redemption under the Old Covenant
- It was to be constantly remembered and celebrated, and this Psalm joins in the celebration
- For those who are in Jesus, the work of Jesus at the cross and the empty tomb become the central act of redemption
- We are likewise called to constantly remember and celebrate what God did to set us free by dying on the cross for us
- *a people of strange language*: The emphasis is on the idea that Israel did not *belong* in Egypt



God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4

- Though they lived there for some 400 years, it was never their home
- In a similar way, this world is a place of *a people of strange language* for all whom God redeems
- St. Augustine says, “Whenever ‘Egypt’ is mentioned, it means (sorrow), (who brings forth sorrow), or (who applies pressure). It is mostly used as a symbol of this world from which we are committed to come out, spiritually, and not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14)”
- *The house of Jacob* - a name appropriately used here, since it was the family of Jacob that had gone down into Egypt, and that had increased to these great numbers

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- Some scholars believe *Judah*, does not mean the kingdom of Judah, that embraced the two tribes ‘Judah’ and ‘Benjamin’
- And *Israel* does not mean the northern kingdom that embraced the ten remaining tribes, but the whole people came under God's special protection
- *Judah* was the leading tribe, recognized as the tribe where power was to be concentrated, and from which the Messiah was to come Genesis 49:8-12; and hence, the name was early used to denote the entire people
- St. John Chrysostom asks, what is the meaning of *Judah became His sanctuary* and says, “A people serving Him, a people dedicated to Him, a people belonging to Him.”



God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4

- According to St. Augustine, “Judah” means (confession)
- By confession, the believer gets cleansed and purified, to become God’s sanctuary
- *And Israel His dominion*, The nation that He ruled; the nation that had His law; the nation that He governed by His presence - or, of which He was the recognized king
- God way of accomplishing that miracle was so wonderful that the forces of nature, the foundations of the created order reacted in astonishing ways
- The psalmist personified nature and described it as responding to God in fear or reverence



God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4

- Here he mentioned the parting of waters at both *sea*, which is the Red Sea and the *Jordan* River, at the beginning and end of Israel's journey to the Promised Land
- The Red Sea of the Exodus from Egypt and the Jordan of the entry into the Holy Land are personified and transformed into witnesses and instruments that have a part in the liberation done by God
- At the beginning in the Exodus, the sea rolls back to allow Israel to pass
- And at the end of the journey through the desert, it is the Jordan which turns back in its course, leaving its bed dry so that the procession of the children of Israel can cross over (Joshua 3-4)

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- St. John Chrysostom notes the importance of the expressions used, he says, “He did not say, ‘it yielded’, or ‘it gave ground;’ but what? *The sea saw it and fled*: he wanted by flight to emphasize the speed of the yielding, the degree of astonishment, the ease of God’s beneficent action. In case you think this happened at a certain period of time and by chance, it has not happened since then. But once only, when God so directed”
- All those carried symbolic meanings, which were realized, and still are, when man receives faith in the Lord Christ
- The sea is the symbol of the world, evil, and Satan

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- All flee before God
- And the river represent the love of material things which *turned back* before the believer's love for God
- The River Jordan is *turning back*, may also points to the grace of baptism, received the repentant believer; when the Holy Spirit dwells on him
- The psalmist mentioned the beginning of the Exodus and the end of the journey and at the center, there is a reference to Sinai
- It is now the mountains that participate in the great divine revelation which takes place on their hilltops

God, the Mighty Leader 114:1-4



- The psalmist likened them to living creatures such as rams and lambs, they skip and exult
- They seemed to move from place to place; everything seemed to be unsettled, and acknowledged the presence of the Omnipotent One
- The idea of *skipped like rams* carries also the thought of *joy*
- Perhaps the reference here is to the thundering and commotions of the peaks of Sinai, when God came down to deliver the law Exodus 19:16-18

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- The past becomes present to the psalmist's mind, and he challenges Nature, the *sea* and the *mountains* to explain its behavior
- With a very vivid personification, the psalmist now asks the mountains about the reason for their confusion
- What did you see? What did you feel, which caused you to flee in such haste?
- And asks the *Jordan*: what does it mean that you did not continue to flow as usual?
- What was it that stopped your flowing tide? that cut off your waters? that drove them back faster than they came?

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- *O mountains*, What caused these trembling motions, and quaking, and moving like the skipping of rams?
- And *O little hills* like lambs? What was it that disturbed you, and put you into a panic, that you skipped like frightened lambs?
- The confusion of the mountains and the hills was a startled adoration in the presence of the Lord, God of Israel, an act of glorious exaltation of the transcendent and saving God
- These questions are put, by a beautiful figure, to lifeless creatures; the Red sea, the river of Jordan, the mountains of Sinai and Horeb, and the hills about them

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- The psalmist provide the answer to his questions
- They were powerless to stand against the mighty presence of God
- It is even more foolish to think that mankind can stand against God's mighty presence
- The earth has felt the presence of God, and has trembled, and has done right to tremble
- The presence that has made itself felt is the presence of the God of Jacob - the God who watches over Jacob, and will help and protect him constantly

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- This is not to be understood of the general and common presence of God, which is everywhere, and with all His creatures for this is not attended with such wonderful phenomena as here mentioned, either in the literal or spiritual sense
- But of the majestic, powerful, and gracious presence of God; such as He sometimes causes to attend His ministers, His word, His churches, His martyrs and confessors; and so as to strike an awe upon, and terror into, their greatest enemies, as well as to convert His own people

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- The psalmist remembered one more event which demonstrated God's power over creation during the Exodus years – when God brought forth water for His people from *the rock* and the hardened *flint*
- *The flint* - Another name for the rock - used here to describe the greatness of the miracle
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Tell me, what excuse do we still have? Why are we so cruel, and non-submissive? When even the solid and hard rock and the flint have submitted to the command of God? Why is it that the human being, with what he was given of reason, surpassing any other creature, is so non-responsive?”

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- This assured the people of God that His mighty presence works for them, not against them
- God's great power and might are not merely for the dividing of waters and the shaking of mountains
- His majestic might brings blessing to His people
- It denotes not merely a historic fact but an attribute expressed in the terms of historic fact
- He Who made water flow from the rock in Rephidim and the cliff in Kadesh (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:8.; Psalm 78:15-16,20) can still provide streams of blessing for His people

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- The same almighty power that turned waters into a rock to be a wall to Israel (Exodus 14:22) turned the rock into waters to be a well to Israel: as they were protected, so they were provided for
- This gesture acquires, then, a symbolic meaning: it is a sign of the saving love of the Lord who sustains and regenerates humanity as it advances though the desert of history
- The rock was a type of Christ, *“All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ”* (I Corinthians 10:4)

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- Commenting on the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, Origen says: “Do not think that it was only then that Moses led the people out of Egypt: now too we have Moses with us..., that is, the law of God wants to bring you out of Egypt; if you listen to it, it wishes to distance you from Pharaoh.... It does not want you to remain in the dark actions of the flesh, but to go out into the desert, that you reach a place apart from the disturbances and instability of the world, that you reach stillness and silence... So when you have arrived in this place of calm, there you can sacrifice to the Lord, recognize the law of God and the power of the divine voice”

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- Taking up the Pauline image that calls to mind the crossing of the sea, Origen continues: “The Apostle calls this a baptism, realized in Moses in the cloud and sea, so that you too, who have been baptized in Christ, in water and in the Holy Spirit, may know that the Egyptians are pursuing you and want to reclaim you to serve them: namely, the rulers of this world and the evil spirits to whom you were first enslaved. They will certainly seek to follow you, but you will go into the water and escape unharmed, and having washed away the stains of sin, you will come out as a new man ready to sing the new song”

Nature Submission to God

114:5-8



- Psalm 114 ends without giving any specific instruction to the people of God, but simply declares His great works
- We again remind ourselves that Jesus probably sang this Psalm together with His disciples on the night He was betrayed and arrested (Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26)
- He would grant the people of God a greater deliverance than Israel out of Egypt
- God's presence within His people today will preserve them following their personal "Exodus" from the sin of Egypt and "Red Sea baptism," giving them spiritual drink from the divine Rock (1 Corinthians 10:1-6,11)



Discussion

- What are the Hallel Psalms?
- What two events from Israel's redemptive history are referred to in this Psalm?
- Why was it a blessing that Israel was delivered from Egypt?
- To what event was the psalmist referring in mentioning water and hills?

Discussion



- What question did the psalmist pose to nature? Why?
- What should motivate God's people to fear Him?
- What conclusion did the psalmist draw from his meditation on God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt?
- The Lord separated Israel from Egypt, and He also separated Israel unto Himself. What has the Lord separated you from? How is your life better because the Lord separated you unto Himself?