



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 125

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Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Song of Ascents*
- Like the others in the series of 15 Psalms of Ascents, (120-134), it was especially appropriate for those pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for one of the three annual major feasts of Israel
- It is not certain who was the author of this Psalm, and on what occasion was written
- However, verse 3 suggests a time of oppressive and cruel rule
- Some scholars believe it was written after the captivity and probably a little later in Nehemiah's life, when the walls of Jerusalem have been successfully restored, God has given His people an assurance that the oppression will not continue



Introduction

- Psalm 125 is a Psalm that is written for people who are living under wicked rule – but God will protect, keep and care for those who trust in Him
- Psalm 125 is a Psalm of assurance for those who trust in the Lord as well as an encouragement to persevere
- It may be summarized in those words of Isaiah 3:10-11, *"Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him"*
- It is a triumph Psalm, and it is also one of the Psalms of Zion
- The Psalms of Ascent are Psalms that build upon each other
- That is another reason why they are called Psalms of ascent



Introduction

- Psalm 125 takes the hills of Psalm 121 and the holy city of Psalm 122 and combines them into a new image showing God's people are as safe and secure as Mount Zion surrounded by the other mountains
- Psalm 122 focused on the architecture of Jerusalem to show the closeness of God's people
- Psalm 125 focuses on the geography of Jerusalem to show the security of God's people
- Some of the Jewish Rabbis think that it has reference to the days of the Messiah when Israel, as they suppose, will be in safe and prosperous circumstances, and the wicked will be consumed



Introduction

- However, Christians may certainly, in singing this Psalm, take comfort of these promises
- The Psalm describes the safety and security of the church and the people of God
- It prophesies their deliverance from the oppressions of their enemies
- It describes the blessings of goodness that will be bestowed upon them, and the punishment that will be taken on the wicked



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2
- God's Protecting Providence 125:3
- A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- The first two verses illustrate two things
- First, what one is like when he trust in the Lord
- And second what the Lord is like to those who trust in Him
- Some people are like the sand, always shifting and unstable (Matthew 7:26)
- Some people are like the sea, doubtful and restless, (Isaiah 57:20; James 1:6)
- And some are like, *“children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,”* (Ephesians 4:14)

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- But the people of God *Are like Mount Zion*
- It is, and has been always, a characteristic of the people of God that they trust in Him
- Mountains, in general, are not easily moved and throughout the Bible they are used as symbols of stability and strength
- Mount Zion is the mountain where Jerusalem sits, and for the people of God this was the ultimate symbol of stability (Psalm 93:1 &c.; Isaiah 54:10)
- Mount Zion is here named in particular, because the Psalm concerns the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and it was so intimately connected with a biding Divine purpose

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- As we read in Isaiah, *“That the Lord has founded Zion, And the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.”* (Isaiah 14:32)
- And *“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.”* (Isaiah 28:16)
- The psalmist wants those who trust in the Lord to know that a position of trust is a position of stability
- Those who trust in the Lord cannot be moved (Psalm 46:4-7; 1 Peter 2:4-10)

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- St. John Chrysostom explains why he says, *Which cannot be moved, but abides forever, and says*, “This describes the lot of those there who enjoy the heavenly Jerusalem: those succeeding to it are freed of all changing circumstances; there is now nothing to trip them up there – no lust, no pleasures, no occasion of sin, no grief or struggle or danger; all these have vanished.”
- In the first verse, the stability of the faithful is compared to that of Mount Zion; and in verse 2 their security is compared to that of the city *surrounded* by its hills or *mountains*
- Those who trust in the Lord are like Jerusalem; fully guarded, forever

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- *As the mountains surround,* All these are higher than the platform upon which the city is built
- These mountains provided a natural barrier or guard around the city of God
- These mountain defend the city, not only from all kinds of stormy winds, the force of which these mountains broke, but from the assaults of its enemies
- The psalmist says that those who trust God are like Jerusalem, surrounded and guarded by God
- The pilgrims coming to Jerusalem saw these mountains and with this Psalm they made spiritual application from the geography

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- God promised not only to be present with His people, but also to be *all around* them
- He would *surround* them, so that nothing can get to them unless it first pass through Him
- He is our guard against the power of sin and Satan and the opposition of the world (Psalm 121:5-8; John 10:27-29)
- This promise *abides* for the people of God – those who trust Him
- God's surrounding protection will be with believers *forever*, as Jesus promised His presence to His people to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20)
- According to St. Augustine these high mountains are those who preach the truth, whether they are angels, apostles, or prophets

Those Who Trust in the Lord Are Safe 125:1-2



- He says, “your hope may not be in the mountains, but in Him who enlightens the mountains. As, when He dwells in the mountains, namely, in the saints, He, Himself, will be around His people, and protects them by spiritual strongholds, so that they would not be moved forever.”
- St. John Chrysostom says, “He mentions help coming to the city through these things and from its position, but does not allow trust to be placed in them; rather, he directs them up to certain and sure assistance, God. In other words, even if mountains fortify it, he is saying, it needs protection from Him ... do not trust in a ring of mountains.”

God's Protecting Providence

125:3



- This was the protection God promised to His people who trusted in Him
- In Israel's history, that *scepter of wickedness* only rested on the land when God's people were stubbornly unrighteous and untrusting in Him
- The word *scepter* or the rod or the staff, the instrument of inflicting punishment - here means dominion and power
- The psalmist may be writing for people who are living under wicked rulers, but the promise of God is that evil won't rule forever

God's Protecting Providence

125:3



- The people of God are not to expect immunity from trial because the Lord surrounds them, for they may feel the power and persecution of the ungodly
- But God has set a limit
- Those who live under this kind of rule may be tempted to follow the ways of those in power, but God will protect His people and ensure that they are not overcome
- As we read in 1 Corinthians, *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

God's Protecting Providence

125:3



- St. Augustine says, “The scepter of wickedness may come upon the portion of the righteous, but will not stay there forever. The time will come when Christ will appear in His glory, and all the nations will be gathered before Him (Matthew 25: 32-33). There, you will see many servants among the flock of sheep on His right hand, and many masters among the goats. As not all the servants are good , and not all the masters are wicked, It is befitting of the good servants who happen to be serving wicked masters, to endure them for some time.”
- And St. John Chrysostom says, “He will not allow the wicked to have power over the inheritance of the righteous; if He does it for a time, it is only for their correction and chastisement.”

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- While the first three verses of the Psalm are an encouragement and an assurance for those who trust God, verse 4 is a prayer that God would bless those who are striving to trust Him
- *Do good, O Lord, to those who are good*, is a reference to those who trust in God and the psalmist is asking God to bless those who remain faithful in trusting Him
- It is a prayer for God to protect, preserve and provide for His people, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- This teaches us to pray for all good people, *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”* (Ephesians 6:18)
- *upright in their hearts*, It is a further description of good men, from the integrity and sincerity of their hearts
- They are those who do before God and men, in the uprightness of their souls, kindly and sincerely, from right principles, and with right views
- As Nehemiah’s prayer, *“Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”* (Nehemiah 5:19)

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- *“Remember me, O my God, for good.”* (Nehemiah 13:31)
- According to St. Augustine the good are those, “who follow the will of God, not their own will,—reflect upon this. But they who wish to follow God, allow Him to go before, and themselves to follow; not themselves to go before, and Him to follow; and in all things they find Him good, whether chastening, or consoling, or exercising, or crowning, or cleansing, or enlightening.”
- While verse 4 is a prayer for the faithful, verse 5 is a warning for those who are tempted to forsake their trust in God
- The psalmist warns that God will judge all those who fail to truly trust in Him (Mark 4:16-19; 1 John 2:15-17)

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- The psalmist does not pray for those whose ways are *crooked*, but he predicts what will happen, *The Lord shall lead them away With the workers of iniquity*
- Sinful ways are *crooked ways*; sin is the perverting of that which is right
- *crooked ways*, means deviations from the straight path of right
- This is in direct contrast to the *upright* heart in verse 4
- Those who turn to crooked ways, the Lord will cast out with the evildoers
- There will be a separation of the good and the wicked at judgment day

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- And there will be a banishing of those who do evil
- Jesus said in Matthew 7: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:21-23)
- The psalmist is writing for people who are living in a hard situation and so he ends the Psalm with a prayer of blessing for those who trust in God

A Prayer for the Faithful and a Warning to the Wicked 125:4-5



- He prays that God will give them peace
- As if he stretching out his hands over all Israel, as if blessing them like a priest, embraces all his hopes, petitions, and wishes in the one prayer *Peace be upon Israel*
- Peace is something that God gives to His people not only in this life, but in eternity it will be experienced it in fullest measure (Psalm 122:6-9; John 14:27; Isaiah 26:3)
- Perhaps St. Paul was referring to this verse in Galatians 6:16, *“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”*



Discussion

- What does the “mountain” represent in verse one? In verse two?
- How does genuine trust in the Lord produce stability in one’s life?
- What is a *scepter*— and why does the psalmist refer to one in verse 3?
- What temptation is there for the righteous? How is this a temptation for those who are trying to follow the ways of God today?



Discussion

- What two paths does the psalmist mention in verses 4 and 5, and where do they lead? How does this relate back to verse 1? How does it help us define what trust looks like?
- What should our attitude be toward those who *turn aside to their crooked ways*?
- What role does prayer have on one's ability to trust in the Lord?