



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 128

Metropolitan Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Song of Ascents*
- It is another of the 15 Psalms recited by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, usually for one of the three yearly feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles)
- The author of this Psalm is unknown, as is also the occasion on which it was composed
- Psalm 128 builds off of Psalm 127
- The Psalms of Ascent not only trace our ascent to God's heart, but they also build off of each other
- The two Psalms work together as a pair discussing similar themes but from a different angle



Introduction

- For example, Psalm 127 speaks of the city and the home
- Psalm 128 focuses on God's work in and through the family
- Psalm 127 is a Psalm of trust that focuses on receiving God's blessing as a gift
- Psalm 128 is a Psalm of triumph that focuses on gaining God's blessing as a reward
- Psalm 127 is all about God and His gifts to us
- Psalm 128 is all about our attitudes and actions towards God
- Psalm 127 warns that life, family, and work are in vain without God



Introduction

- Psalm 128 says that life, family, and work are blessed when you live for God
- As part of this blessing, the godly man's wife is described as "*a fruitful vine*" (verse 3)
- This refers in part to her being the mother of his children
- Likewise, their children are likened to promising olive plants, ever green and with the promises of both long life and productivity
- The vine and olive tree are frequently paired in the Old Testament (Exodus 23:11)



Introduction

- Both were especially long-lived, and they produced the wine and the oil that played such a central role in the lives of the people
- The metaphor of the fruitfulness of the vine extends, not only to the bearing of children, but also to everything the wife contributes to the welfare of family (Proverbs 31:10-31)
- Psalm 128 was written that believers may know the joy that only God can give
- The Psalm teaches that the prosperity of the families depends upon the blessing of God and the only way to obtain that blessing is to live in the fear of God and in obedience to Him



Introduction

- Happiness is not determined by one's physical or financial condition but by one's spiritual condition
- Some scholars classify Psalm 128 as a "wisdom Psalm"
- Some of the Fathers believe that the Psalmist speaks to the Church concerning Christ
- This Psalm is recited during the Crowning Ceremony in the Coptic Orthodox Church



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4
- A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- The psalmist begins by stating the theme of the Psalm, *Blessed is every one who fears the LORD*
- To be blessed (happy, fulfilled, satisfied) is the primary message of the entire book of Psalms (Psalms 1:1, 94:12, 112:1, 119:1-2, 128:1)
- It is certainly the central theme of this Psalm
- God's blessing rests upon the person who fears Him
- Fearing God means to reverence Him deeply and to honor Him greatly
- About the fear of the Lord it is written, *"Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."* (Psalm 34:11)

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- Therefore, it is a thing we ought to learn, because it has nothing to do with terror, but with reasonable instruction, and is to be entered upon not with physical fear, but with obedience to the commandments, with the works of a blameless life, and with the knowledge of the truth
- For if the only reason of fearing God is because many places have been struck and fired by thunder and lightning, have been swallowed up by earthquakes, there is nothing of the merit of faith in our fear, since it is merely stirred by fear of something happening

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- But all our fear of God is pure and out of our love to Him
- A love which makes us *walk in His ways*
- It was not fundamentally a matter of having certain feelings toward God, but a matter of a life of obedience
- In other words, a right attitude towards God leads to right actions in your life
- Jesus said in John 14:21: *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”*(John 14:21)

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- Walking in God's ways is to live in daily obedience to the word of God
- And though there is only one way, Jesus Christ Himself, yet here many ways are spoken of, to show us that entrance is not limited to any particular calling or way of serving God
- St. John Chrysostom says that saying *every one*, he opens the door before all men, whatever is the position, possibilities, age, or social status
- God, the Lover of all mankind, wishes to include everyone in this family, extending from Adam to the end of ages

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- In verse 2 the psalmist offer a personal application of the general principle of verse 1, addressed to any God-fearing father of a family
- God's faithful servant shall enjoy the fruits of his own work
- His labor shall not be vain and fruitless, and the fruit of his labor shall not be taken from him, as was threatened to the disobedient
“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” (Deuteronomy 28:15)

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- *When you eat the labor of your hands*, May be understood both in a literal and spiritual sense
- Man must labor to get his bread: *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."* (2 Thessalonians 3:10)
- And, in a spiritual sense, good men labor in prayers lifting up holy hands to God, wrestling with Him for a blessing
- God's blessing can mean that, *it shall be well with you*, that is good, pleasant, delightful: *"They shall not build and another inhabit; They shall not plant and another eat; ... My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."* (Isaiah 65:22)

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- The whole passage is applied by some of the commentators to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who, according to His manhood, did fear His heavenly Father and walk in all His ways
- And Who had His reward in the virtues of His Militant Church on earth and the glories of His triumphant Church in heaven
- And a spiritual reference to the Holy Eucharist
- For that holy Sacrament does come indeed from the labors of those Hands which were nailed on the Cross for our salvation, and He is the Head of that Body which eats and drinks of Him

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- The second point of blessedness is a fruitful wife
- Proverbs 18:22 says, *“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.”*
- Two things are noted here as the qualities of a good wife, fertility and childbearing; and housekeeping, denoted by the phrase *In the very heart of your house*, thus marking off the habits of a good wife from those of the idle gossip, of whom Solomon writes that *“For she sits at the door of her house, On a seat by the highest places of the city.”* (Proverbs 9:14)
- God’s blessing is related to productivity and fruitfulness

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- And this does not just mean bearing children, but it means having a full and productive life
- The picture here is of a beautiful vine that is thriving, flourishing, fruitful and productive
- According to Proverbs 31 she is faithful, not just fruitful
- *In the very heart of your house*, is literally, in the inner rooms of your house
- It affirms the traditional family where the husband works the field, and the wife works the home and even if she works outside the home, a godly wife's heart is at home

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- She embraces the dignity of marriage and motherhood with contentment
- *Your children like olive plants*, The olive is chosen as a type of prosperity, because it is evergreen, strong, and fruitful
- *around your table*, as all in their father's sight, and as being ready waiting on him for any service
- A numerous offspring was always accounted a very great blessing; and it must be very pleasant to a parent to see his children around his table
- *vines and olive plants*, are biblical symbols of the abundant life and they symbolize rich blessing and are not like wheat or corn

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- These earthly children are figures of the spiritual children of the Church; fruitful, peaceful, gathered around God's altar; or gathered around the table of Holy Scripture
- The spiritual seed and offspring of Christ are like olive trees or olive plants; to which David is compared, *"But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God."* (Psalm 52:8)
- All true believers in Jesus Christ are *olive plants* because of their fruitfulness, *"The Lord called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit."* (Jeremiah 11:16)

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- Many church fathers believe that the whole figure is taken of the Church, as the Bride of Christ, the Head of the Body, the Vine
- The church is the bride and may be compared to a vine for her fruitfulness in grace and good works, and in bringing forth souls to Christ, through the ministry of the word, *“Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine.”* (Psalm 80:14)
- And so, the first three verses of Psalm 128 paints a beautiful picture of a godly husband, a faithful wife and eager children full of promise – all this is a great sign of God’s blessing in the home

Blessed Are All Who Fear the Lord 128:1-4



- *Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the Lord*, This is the foundation on which to build a life that is blessed by God
- The purpose and significance of the first verse is repeated, to emphasize the lesson that only those who fear the Lord can reasonably look for His blessing
- The person who reverences God will be divinely favored
- He will know grace upon grace
- The goodness of God will rest upon his life in double measure



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- As another of the Songs of Ascents, it is natural for the pilgrims who recite this Psalm to think about the connection of blessing with Jerusalem
- The psalmist prays for the Lord *to bless you out of Zion*, Zion is the place where God dwell
- God has good for His people that will come *out of Zion*
- *Out of Zion*, in the literal sense, from the Temple, as the center of Jewish hope and worship from where the blessing of the Lord circulated over and through the whole of *Jerusalem*; keeping her safe from the approach of the enemies so long as He was obeyed and honored



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- *Zion* is the place where God meets with His people
- Blessing in our life comes as we meet daily with the Lord in His presence
- The blessings include also seeing Jerusalem prosper
- He prayed for his nation to prosper spiritually, economically and militarily
- For the one who fears the Lord, it is a blessing for him to see *the good of Jerusalem*
- It shows that there is a sense in which a happy home is not enough; we must also have care for our community and nation



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- The strength of any city lies in its strong family life
- Strong and happy homes are for *the good* of a city
- This is a prayer of blessing not just for a time or a season, but for *All the days of your life*
- God is the source of all blessing, and this prayer is a reminder that every blessing comes from God
- It is similar to that of Psalm 23 which says “*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.*” (Psalm 23:6)
- The blessing to the one who fears the Lord goes beyond the holy city and impacts the family, *may you see your children’s children*



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- The psalmist sees the blessing as enjoying grandchildren
- This is mentioned as the crowning blessing granted to Job in his second period of happiness (Job 42:16)
- It is here promised to the faithful generally
- Psalm 128 reminds us that *children's children* are God's blessing
- People ought to pass on their faith to their children and grandchildren
- The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy: *"I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice."* (2 Timothy 1:5)



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- It is worth noting the progression in this Psalm from the individual (1-2) to the family (3-4) to the wider community (5-6)
- Applying this to the Church, it tells of the long succession of teachers raised up in spiritual children of the Apostles
- *Peace be upon Israel*, The Psalm ends with this joyful and confident declaration
- This is the third prayer for the peace of Israel we have seen so far in the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 122:6, 125:5)
- He is praying for all kind of prosperity, temporal and spiritual; peace, and abundance of it



A Prayer of Blessing for Those Who Fear the Lord 128:5-6

- Psalm 128 teaches us that how we live our life matters
- The person attitude and actions have an impact not only on his personal life, but also on his family, on his community and on future generations
- Psalm 128 teaches us that the influence of the godly person is great, that God's blessing flows outward from the individual, to family, to church, to the whole people of God
- The key to a fulfilled life is having a right relationship with God
- It is found in trusting and walking with Him
- Only in fearing and following God does a person experience successful living



Discussion

- According to verse 1, what two things will result in the Lord's blessing? How would you describe each of these in your own words?
- What is the great condition upon which the blessings presented in this Psalm must stand?
- What does it mean to "fear" the Lord? What impact does a man's fear of God have on his work, marriage, and children?



Discussion

- What does the psalmist describe as the outcome of the happy life?
- What are the foundational views of God and His character expressed in Psalm 128? How does this relate to our response to “fear the Lord”?
- How is Psalm 128 related to Psalm 127?