



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 131

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# Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Song of Ascents. Of David*
- According to the title David is the author
- There are four Psalms of David in the Psalms of Ascent, (Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133)
- It is not known on what occasion it was written, nor why it has a place among the *Song of Ascents*
- Commentators suggest some possible occasions for its composition
- Some think it was written by David in his younger days, before he came to the throne; while he was in Saul's court



# Introduction

- David composed it in response to Saul's accusation
- David was accused of having some evil plans against Saul and of being an ambitious man, who, under allegation of a divine appointment, sought the kingdom, in the pride of his heart, 1 Samuel 24:9
- But he appeals to God, that, he is on the contrary
- Others say that perhaps David composed it in response to his wife, Michal, when she accused him of being shameful and humiliating after he danced in the procession of bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:16-23)



# Introduction

- And some think the Psalm was written during the captivity; it contains an account of the manner in which the captives behaved, in great humility, under the power of their oppressors
- The Psalm manifests a humble spirit, and a spirit of confident trust in God
- David is a good example of someone who learned the truths of this Psalm well
- When David was hunted by Saul, he refused to take matters into his own hands, but trusted God to make him king when the time was right



# Introduction

- This Psalm is David's profession of humility, humbly made, with thankfulness to God for his grace, and not in vain-glory
- As a *Song of Ascents*, Psalm 131 may have been used either by pilgrims going to Jerusalem or by Levites as they went up the steps of the Temple
- Either way, the physical ascent requires similar spiritual ascent
- A heart *not* lifted up, eyes *not* raised too high
- Psalm 131 dictates an inner posture for worship
- This short Psalm is a beautiful denial of pride, arrogance, and selfish ambition



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- David Professes His Humility 131:1-2
- He Exhorts Israel to Hope in God 131:3



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- The Psalm begins with an attitude of humility
- David understood the principle explained in Proverbs and quoted twice in the New Testament: *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5)
- He is not boasting about his humility to others; rather he is confessing his humility to God
- David writes that his heart is not proud, meaning he is not seeking self-importance, but humbling himself to the call of the Lord
- Even though he was accused of pride, but this is not who he is



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- Though David had been anointed by Samuel, and knew that he was to be successor in the kingdom, yet his heart was not lifted with it
- The whole Psalm speaks of a gentle humility before the Lord
- Pride is the main obstacle between people and God
- Pride is what caused Satan to fall, and is what caused Adam and Eve to listen to Satan in the garden: *“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility”* (Proverbs 18:12)
- The heart is mentioned in scriptures 826 times, why is the heart so significant?





# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- The answer is found in Proverbs, *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”* (Proverbs 4:23)
- Everything people do, whether good or evil, is an overflow of the heart
- A heart loves the Lord will pour out goodness, whereas a heart loves one’s self will pour out evil
- Jesus warns us in Matthew where our treasure should be – not of earthly things that will disappear, but on things in heaven, things that are eternal: *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:21)



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- Jesus Christ tells us that from the same heart that can overflow with love, evil can pour forth, Mark 7:20-23
- Our hearts determine our path, and that can be the path of obedience in the Lord or the path of disobedience and pride
- Where there is a proud heart there is commonly a proud look (Proverbs 6:17)
- David had neither an arrogant heart, nor a desiring look, *eyes lofty*
- He is saying that he neither look with envy and desire to obtain, to the state of others, nor look down with contempt to the meanness or poverty of those below him



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- The eyes are lamps of the bodies, *“If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”* (Matthew 6:22-23)
- There is a good lifting up of the eyes, *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help?”* (Psalm 121:1)
- But there is also a wrong lifting up of the eyes where one lifts them up only to look down on other people
- And that’s what David means by *eyes lofty*
- Proverbs speaks of these haughty eyes *“There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.”* (Proverbs 30:13)



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- One can either look up to the Lord or look down on other people
- *Neither do I concern myself with great matters*, David learned to reject *selfish ambition*, and he chose not to pursue *things too profound* for him
- He did not set his focus on promotion or position above what God had appointed in the present season
- Jesus Christ taught us to accept a lower place (Luke 14:8-11) and wait patiently for God to lift us up in His wisdom and timing
- There are godly desires (Philippians 3:12-14) and then there are selfish ambitions (2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20; Philippians 1:16; 2:3)



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- One way to distinguish between them is to look for a focus on God (related to spiritual aspirations) or a focus on self (selfish ambition)
- *great matters...things too profound* These can also apply to some intellectual pursuits that may become expressions of pride
- In pride, we can demand to know aspects of God's will or mind
- This was Job's sin, of which he repented (Job 40:1-5,42:1-6)
- As if Davis is saying, "I have learned not to reach beyond my grasp. I have learned not to expend great effort trying to do things beyond my ability or attempting to understand things beyond my comprehension."



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- So, the first verse of the Psalm is about practicing humility
- The second one tells what happens when one practices humility
- One can learn contentment
- Instead of proud pursuits, David *surely* found satisfaction and serenity of *soul*, content with God and His works
- On the contrary of pride, he has been under the rod of others, and when chastised he has not complained
- His silence under his affliction was the fullest proof that he neither complained nor was discontent but received all as coming from the hands of a just God



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- David is saying that he has eliminated those things which agitate his soul, pride in self, pride towards others (comparing), and pride towards God
- He felt he must sacrifice many conveniences and comforts which he once enjoyed; and these he gave up without discontentment or objection
- David says it with an emphasis on what he did, *I have calmed and quieted my soul*
- Of course, it was ultimately the work of God within him, but it was really connected to his own will and choices



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- He is no longer disturbed by the storms, but he has brought his soul into a state of peacefulness and content
- *Like a weaned child with his mother*, A child, not yet weaned, embraces his mother with the thought of food and immediate satisfaction
- As the child that has gone through the troublesome process of weaning can lie happily and contentedly in its mother's arms without worrying or craving for the mother's milk, so David's soul, weaned from worldly ambition, can lie still without complaining or discontentment





# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- The relationship of *a weaned child* shifts from one of complete dependence, where the child wants to be with his mother in order to be fed, to one of desire where the child wants to be with his mother out of love
- He embraces his mother not out of need any more, but out of a desire for love, closeness, and companionship
- Such was David's humble desire to draw near to God
- He had been as indifferent to the wealth and honor of this world as a child is to the breast when it is thoroughly weaned from it



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- He is humble, meek, and lowly, and had no more ambitious views, but weaned from the world, its riches, honors, and its pleasures; as well as from his own nature, from self, from his own righteousness, and from all dependence on it
- David compares himself to a child weaned from his mother as a symbol of contentment and spiritual maturity
- The weaned child has reached a new stage of maturity
- And if we are to grow and mature as Christians, we must still and quiet our own souls



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- *Like a weaned child is my soul within me*, The phrase is repeated for emphasis
- We regard the process of weaning as natural, but the child likely regards it as a battle
- David's contentment with God, did not come *naturally*, but through struggle and victory
- St. Augustine presents to us many views concerning this analogy to a weaned child with his mother, made by the psalmist; among which is that God seeks from us to be humble, not to seek what is beyond our abilities; and to rise and be exalted by being weaned off milk, and feeding on solid food



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- St. Augustine says, “I wish to clarify, O brethren, that God wishes us to know, when to be humble, and when to rise up. ... To be humble is to keep ourselves away from pride; and to rise up toward wisdom. ... To feed on milk to grow; and grow to feed on bread. But once we start eating bread, we should be weaned from milk, and feed on solid food. ... He means to say, we should not be children in mind; but children in evil.”
- When God allows things or circumstances in our life that wean us from things we have relied on, we should accept it and understand its meaning and purpose



# David Professes His Humility

## 131:1-2

- St. John Chrysostom says, “What he means is something like this: I was not innocent of this vice – I mean, haughtiness – nor only at a distance from those with it, but I adopted the virtue opposite to it to an extraordinary degree, humility, moderation, contrition. This was exactly the command Christ gave the disciples in the words, ‘Unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.’ Humility like this I practice, David is saying, like the child at the breast just as it clings to the mother, is humble, free of any haughtiness, lives in simplicity and innocence, so too was I in my relationship with God, clinging to Him continually.”

# He Exhorts Israel to Hope in God 131:3



- According to St. John Chrysostom, the psalmist mentioned his own achievements to give comfort to the listener, and to exhorts him to follow it
- God's people could only learn and live the lesson David reflected on in this short Psalm if they set their *hope in the Lord*, and in nothing else
- Nothing or no one else gives the same assurance
- The decision to place one's *hope in the Lord* must have a beginning point, and that point should be now *from this time*
- From there, it should go *forth and forever*, never ending

# He Exhorts Israel to Hope in God 131:3



- *From this time* tells us that we can trust in God for all our present needs
- And the *forever* tells us that we can trust in God for all our future needs
- St. Augustine says, “Until we arrive at eternity, let us trust in the Lord God; because when we have reached eternity, there will be no longer hope, but the thing itself will be ours.”
- Psalm 131 teaches us a simple but profound truth
- Those who practice humility before the Lord find contentment and rest

# He Exhorts Israel to Hope in God 131:3



- But when we are proud in our hearts, when we are arrogant in our attitude towards others, when we demand to be like God and know it all, our hearts are restless and discontent
- A calmed and quieted soul is the fruit of a heart that hopes in God: He is wise enough to plan it, good enough to purpose it, strong enough to bring it about, and He has promised that He would withhold no good thing from those that walk uprightly
- St. Paul reminds us of God's love when he writes in Romans 8:32, *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*





# Discussion

- What is humility?
- What was David trying to convey by proud and haughty?
- How does pride get in the way of contentment?
- Why are children humble (at least in the area of knowledge)?
- How does a little baby feel after nursing?