



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 134

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# Introduction

- This is the last of the series of fifteen Psalms with the title *A Song of Ascents*
- The author is unknown and there is no definite indication of date or occasion
- It may have been composed originally for the worship in the temple
- It may have been composed after the restoration of the Temple-services by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 12:44-47)
- Some think it was written by David, either when he brought the ark to Zion, 2 Samuel 6:17; or rather when he numbered the Levites, and appointed them their service, 1 Chronicles 23:26

# Introduction



- It is a hymn of praise
- It is a call to the priests and Levites of the temple to continue their service of praise, with the answer of a blessing back to the people
- It is like a dialogue that consists of a call (Psalm 134:1-2) and a response (Psalm 134:3)
- The call appears to be addressed by the worshippers in the Temple to the priests and Levites whose duty it was to pray the nightly service of praise to God, and their leader responds to it with a priestly blessing





# Introduction

- This Psalm is connected to Psalm 133
- In 133 the beautiful order and harmony of the temple service is pointed out
- In 134, all are exhorted to diligence and watchfulness in the performance of their duty
- The key word in this Psalm is bless; it is used three times in three verses
- Verses 1-2 contain a call to God's servants to bless God, while verse 3 is a declaration of blessing from God on His people



# Introduction

- A blessing from people directed to God is a word of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving
- Or an expressed wish to see all of God's purposes fulfilled, implying cheerful and committed cooperation with Him submitting fully to His will
- This Psalm is one of the Psalms of the hour of 'Compline', in which the believer is encouraged to praise the Lord at night
- It is also prayed in the Midnight Prayer as God's people ought to, *"At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You."* (Psalm 119:62)



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2
- The Creator's Blessing 134:3



# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- *Behold*, The word calls attention to an immediate need something that is to be done, and to be done at once
- As if the people are shouting to the *servants of the Lord*
- *bless the Lord*, As in several other places in the Holy Book of Psalms, this does not mean to *bless* in the sense that a greater bestows a blessing on a lesser
- God is infinitely greater than man, and man could never give a blessing to God
- A blessing from people directed to God is a word of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving

# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- The *servants of the Lord* here in the Psalm are the priests and the Levites who ministered in the temple
- They were *the servants of the Lord*, appointed to minister in holy things; they attended the sanctuary, and kept the charge of the house of the Lord, Numbers 3:6
- And here he addresses particularly the servants who minister by night in the house of the Lord
- The Holy Scriptures tells us that the Levites in particular praised the Lord both day and night



# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- We read in 1 Chronicles 9:33: *“These are the singers, heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites, who lodged in the chambers, and were free from other duties; for they were employed in that work day and night.”*
- And in 1 Chronicles 23:30: *“to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at evening”*
- *“bless the Lord, not only by day, but also and especially by night because it is comparatively easy to bless the Lord in the daytime*
- St. Augustine says, “It is easy to bless by day. What is ‘by day? In prosperity. For night is a sad thing, day a cheerful. When it is well with you, you do not bless the Lord.”

# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- He continues and says, “Your son was sick, and he is made whole, you do bless the Lord... perhaps a curse against the Lord has come, not from your tongue, but from your deeds, from your deeds and your life. Boast not, because you bless with your tongue, if you curse with your life. Wherefore bless the Lord. When? By night. When did Job bless? When it was a sad night.”
- All are encouraged to pray, sing, and praise the Lord in His house and not stand there silent and idle

# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- According to St. John Chrysostom, the servants of the Lord ought to not only keep His commandments, but to live according to them
- He says, “As it is not befitting of anyone unclean or defiled to enter into the holy sanctuaries. He who is worthy to enter would also be worthy of the blessing. The house of the Lord is like heaven; And the way the adversary hosts are not allowed to enter into heaven, it is the same way concerning the house of the Lord. Now, how could you show this purity? If you keep away any evil thought, or the works of the devil, from entering into your minds; If you adorn your minds, as it is befitting of the holy temple.”



# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- He continues and says, “If, in the Jewish temple, not all places are wide open before everyone; but there are a place for the Jews; another for the priests and the Levites; and another for the high priest alone, not all the time, but only once a year – Then, you should put into your consideration the degree of reverence, required from him, who gets what is greater than the symbol, and greater than the Holy of Holiness in that time! The Lord Himself, dwelling inside him;...the body and blood of the Lord;...Now, as you, seemingly, are more worthy of the great symbols and the awesome secrets; you are required to prove a greater holiness.”

# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- Blessing is often used in the Holy Bible in connection with the hands
- It displayed the anticipation of gratefully receiving from God, and the sense of surrender to Him
- It adds a visual and a physical element to worship and prayer
- And as the hands refer to the work; the believers, together with meditating in God's love, grace, and care, should practice what is befitting of them; so that their life would be in harmony with their meditations, prayers, and praises
- The apostle Paul invites us to lift pure hands: *"I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting"* (1 Timothy 2:8)

# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- Lifting up the hands means offering repentance and asking for forgiveness of sins
- When one lifts up his hands before God he is opening himself up to Him, confessing his need for Him and his dependence upon Him
- Lifting up the hands is also offering oneself up for examination and assessment
- We read in Psalm 24: *“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.”* (Psalm 24:3-4)



# A Call for Servants to Bless the Lord 134:1-2



- This is a Psalms of Ascent, and who may ascend to the Lord?
- Only the person who has clean hands and a pure heart
- Lifting up the hands is the symbol of the cross as Moses did, *“when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.”* (Exodus 17:11)
- *And bless the Lord.* The idea is repeated for emphasis
- God’s people should give Him their thanks, honor, praise, and glory



# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- The psalmist looked to God as Creator of all things, and appealed to the God of all might, design, and wisdom with the prayer that follows
- Most commentators see this as a reference to the priestly blessing described in Numbers 6:23-27, with the addition of *from Zion*
- Therefore, they believe that this is the response of the priests and the Levites to the exhortation of the high priest to bless the Lord by night
- And some say it is all the worshippers collectively pronounce a blessing on one another



# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- Others say these are the words of the psalmist, promising a blessing from the Lord to those that blessed Him; as an encouragement to them, to be constant and diligent in this service
- It is the blessing of the One who made heaven and earth
- And so they ought to rejoice at this great portion
- *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)
- All blessings come from the Lord, whether spiritual or temporal; and are to be asked of Him, and expected from Him
- God was regarded as dwelling in Zion, and therefore as giving His blessings out of Zion





# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- The blessings here promised or asked for are blessings out of Zion, the church, where God blesses His people
- St. John Chrysostom says, "*The Lord who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion*, that is, if you do this, you will gain also blessings from the Lord, if you spend the night at it, if you pray in a holy manner, if you are worthy to stand in the house of the Lord, if you present yourself as a fitting temple."
- We have seen that Zion is a major theme throughout these Psalms of Ascents



# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- Zion represents Mount Zion which represents Jerusalem which represents the temple which represents the place where God meets with His people
- Ultimately Zion represents heaven where we will be with God and His people forever
- God *who made heaven and earth* has all the blessings in His control
- He will bless the soul whom He has not only created but redeemed; He cannot fail to bless those that bless



# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- Those whom He blesses are blessed indeed
- *You*, The blessing of this verse applies individually to every believer
- St. Augustine says, "He exhorts many to bless, and Himself bless one, because He makes one out of many, since 'it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in one.' It is a plural number, brethren, and yet singular, to dwell together in one...He blessed one. Be one, and the blessing comes to you."
- Psalm 134 closes out the Psalms of Ascent by teaching us that the life that blesses God is a life that is blessed by God





# The Creator's Blessing 134:3

- The people came to Zion in pilgrimage to bless the Lord, singing the Psalms 120-134
- Now they end here in Psalm 134 with the believer safe at home with God and His people
- The Psalms of Ascents end with the idea that God's blessing went with each of them *from Zion*
- The blessing does not remain in Jerusalem, but flows from there
- And important lessons learned from this Psalm are trusting in and depending on God
- Also, perseverance and faith; forgiveness and humility; unity and blessing



# Discussion

- Psalm 134 was the end of the Psalms of Ascents, according to this short Psalm what was the destination?
- Who are the “servants of the Lord” and what is the “House of the Lord” referred to?
- What is the new “house of the Lord”; in what ways do we do the work of those “servants who minister”?
- What are the two blessings offered in this Psalm?



# Discussion

- Why would it be important that they praise the Lord during the night?
- What does lifting our hands in worship mean?
- To whom was verse 3 addressed?
- How can we bless God?