



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 142

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Introduction

- The title of Psalm 142 is *A Contemplation of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave*
- According to the title David is the author of this Psalm
- The occasion here, as the title notes, is *when he was in the cave*
- This could refer to either of two episodes when David fled from King Saul
- One was into the cave at Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1,4), 16 miles southwest of Jerusalem
- And the other was into the cave at En Gedi (1 Samuel 24:1-22)
- Many think it is most probably the cave at Adullam



Introduction

- *A Prayer*, Either he composed it while he was there, or composed it afterward; expressive of the feelings he had when he was there
- Psalm 57 has similar title, and it is associated with this period of David's life
- In both cases the circumstances were substantially the same, for David had fled to the cave to escape from Saul
- Both Psalms give us a clear idea about David's different feelings and emotions while in trouble
- However, there is a major change of tone between Psalm 57 and Psalm 142



Introduction

- In Psalm 57, David is more aware of God's presence and more confident in God's promises
- In Psalm 57, we see him very strong and steadfast, and with an amazing trust in his victory in the Lord
- Whereas in this Psalm, we see him pouring his complaint before the Lord
- In Psalm 142, David feels more vulnerable and alone and feeling weak before his strong enemy
- Yet he does not lose his hope in the Lord, being sure that He will deal bountifully with him



Introduction

- In both cases, God has not changed
- In both cases, David must trust in the Lord
- The source of David's deliverance has not changed
- Some commentators; however, suppose that the speaker here is Israel, suffering in the prison of exile and lost hope of return
- The Psalm represents the troubles of any soul when in distress
- It is a prayer that may be used to express the feelings of one now in danger
- When one is in distress when there was no refuge - no hope



Introduction

- It is a prayer of a sinner under condemnation, seeing no way of escape, and seeking the mercy of God
- Such a one feels, as David did on this occasion, that there can be no escape but through the intervention of God
- The Psalm represents the troubles of David, and of the Messiah his antitype, and is applicable to the church of God
- This Psalm is one of the Twelfth Hour prayer (Compline), of the Book of Agpeya



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2
- David's Prayer 142:3-4
- God Has Been and Is His Only Hope 142:5-7

David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2



- This was more than David's appeal for help
- It was also his declaration of faith to God
- In these two verses he expressed his suffering by, *cry out*, *I make my supplication*, *I pour out*, and *I declare*
- David was in distress; but prayers and tears were his weapons
- Anguish and deep feeling pressed on him so heavily that he could find relief only in loud cries to God
- As a man of deep spiritual experience, David knew that there were many ways to *cry out to the Lord* – in thought, in feeling, in action

David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2



- Here David cried out to God with his *voice*, feeling that silent feelings were not enough for his present need
- He uttered a loud and audible prayer, though he was alone
- *With my voice*, means aloud, earnestly and pressingly
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Everywhere he makes this beginning and here uses voice twice. It is not without purpose...it is to teach us two things, both the strength of his enthusiasm and vigilance of his mind, and in addition that the voice is his.”
- According to St. Jerome, the prophet, here, is like a patient in great pain, who hastens to the physician to tell him about the symptoms of his illness, anticipating treatment

David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2



- St. Augustine says, “It were enough to say, ‘with voice:’ not for nothing perhaps has ‘my’ been added. For many cry unto the Lord, not with their own voice, but with the voice of their body. Let the ‘inner man’ then, in whom ‘Christ’ has begun to ‘dwell by faith,’ cry unto the Lord, not with the sound of his lips, but with the affection of his heart.”
- David had a *complaint* to bring before God
- As this Psalm develops, David asks for God’s help in the face of enemies who hoped to trap him, so this *complaint* is likely against his enemies
- Whatever the source, David did the right thing with his *complaint*; he brought it before the Lord

David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2



- *I pour out*: Those words teach us that in prayer we should not try to keep anything back from God, but should show Him all that is in our hearts
- *my complaint*, This does not mean that he was *complaining* as if he were *grumbling against God*, but that he was crying out to God concerning his anxiety
- He is telling of his *troubles* – his anguish, affliction, tribulation, and distress
- During our time of *trouble*, we strengthen our faith in God's power to deliver us and we leave our cares and burdens at His door

David Lays His Trouble Before God 142:1-2



- St. John Chrysostom says, “Do you see a spirit freed of earthly concerns? He neither had recourse to human beings, nor looked for assistance from them but for invincible help and grace from above. Wishing to make clear the intensity of his mind and fervor buried within him he said, ‘I pour out’ in great abundance. From this we learn that tribulations also make no slight contribution to sound values. This is the fruit of tribulation, after all. It has in fact two advantages: one, in making us more zealous and attentive; the other, in proving no insignificant reason to be heard... And everywhere in Scripture we shall find that those bearing tribulations with gratitude not only expiate many of their sins but also obtain thereby no little confidence in God’s presence.”



David's Prayer 142:3-4

- Any time David felt *overwhelmed*, he did not see how he could escape from his troubles, and he had no heart to make an effort
- But he found confidence in knowing that God *knew* his journey and his walk
- God knows our *path* and our *walk* in all; good or bad
- It is much for us to feel when we are in danger or difficulty that God knows it all, and that nothing can be hidden from Him
- *They have secretly set a snare for me*: David did not know where the snares were, but he knew they were out there
- David also knew that as he depended upon Him, God could preserve him from secret snares



David's Prayer 142:3-4

- St. John Chrysostom says, "When faint hearted people in particular give up and many utter defamatory words, then the Psalmist most of all employs good sense, having tribulations as a teacher. So, when you see someone despairing as a result of tribulation, or uttering some harsh word, hold not the tribulation responsible but the faintheartedness of the speaker—its natural with tribulation to have the opposite effect—attention, a contrite mind, an alert attitude, depth of piety. Hence Paul also said, 'Tribulation produces endurance and endurance character.'"
- *For there is no one who acknowledges me*, he looked for human help, but there was no one who would know him



David's Prayer 142:3-4

- David felt alone and forsaken, yet this very cry to God declares that David knew that even if he were forsaken by men, God had not forsaken him
- This is often the case when men are in affliction and distress, their former friends keep at a distance from them
- So it was with Job, Job 19:13
- And with the Messiah, the psalmist presents to us a prophecy about the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ, deserted by His own disciples
- The *right* signifies the place where one's witness or legal council stood (Psalm 16:8, 109:31, 110:5, 121:5)



David's Prayer 142:3-4

- He has no one to defend him against the adversaries
- St. John Chrysostom comments and says, "Here he shows the extent of the disaster...and what was worse, that not only were any allies or assistants not at hand, but they did not even recognize him. This is the extent of isolation, the height of alienation...This brought him no harm and instead it gave even greater benefit bringing him into relationship with God. So, when you see evils on the increase, do not lose heart, but be more on the alert: this is the reason God allows them to arise, to shake you from your slumber...one becomes more zealous in prayer, more active in alms giving, in scorn for the belly, and every vice becomes more easily overcome, banished by tribulation."

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- Among men, David had no refuge, *there is no one who acknowledges me*
- Yet as he *cried out to* God, David could confidently proclaim that God was indeed his *refuge*
- The cities of refuge were, in the Old Testament times, for the protection of an Israelite in special circumstances; and David found his place of *refuge* not in a place or in a particular circumstance, but in the Lord Himself
- *My portion in the land of the living*: Many times in David's times as a fugitive, he had reason to believe that all his inheritance in this world was gone

God Has Been and Is His Only Hope 142:5-7



- In such times he had the confidence that God Himself was his *portion*, his inheritance
- The cave was for him but a poor refuge, the crown he was in hope of is but a poor portion
- *You are my refuge*, in whom alone he thinks himself safe
- *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.”* (Proverbs 18:10)
- David can never think himself well provided for till he knows that *the Lord is the portion*
- Those who in sincerity take the Lord for their God shall find Him all-sufficient both as a refuge and as a portion

God Has Been and Is His Only Hope 142:5-7



- David also knew that he would benefit from this *portion in the land of the living*, not only in the age to come but here too
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Not being disparaged he takes refuge in God. Note the attentiveness of spirit. Far from problems overwhelming him, they instead gave him wings, and being in difficulties he knew the invincible hand and all powerful force...He said You are my help: all human means have proved futile and the storm so far exceeds all assistance to be beyond all measures for surviving shipwreck. Yet even if this is beyond Hope in human estimation, and we are sinking, nevertheless everything is easy for You; hence let us hope and not grow faint.”

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- David once again brought his *cry* to the Lord, honestly confessing his *low* circumstances
- David did not feel a need to pretend that everything was fine or that he was not weak; he could come to God for help even when *brought very low* by *persecutors* who were *stronger* than him
- The Psalm ends with an earnest cry for deliverance, and an affirmation of confidence that the cry will be heard and answered
- *They are stronger than I*: This means that David well understood his present weakness
- The one who killed Goliath felt himself to be very weak

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- Actually, that was a good place for David to be
- God's strength would soon flood his life
- St. Jerome comments on *For I am brought very low* and says, "Unless man is humble, God will not compassionately attend to his cry."
- St. Augustine comments on *For they are stronger than I*, and says, "It is the body of Christ crying-out...It is the voice of the church, the body of Christ. 'Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold' (Matthew 24:12)."
- *Bring my soul out of prison*: This was likely a figure of speech, yet David felt constrained and bound in his *soul*

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- He longed to be free from this sense, so that he could *praise* God's *name*
- St. John Chrysostom says, 'What he means is free me from troubles: by 'prison' he hints at the excess of calamities...neither did tribulation make him lose heart but rather led him to supplication and prayer, nor did ease render him resting but led him also at that time to thanksgiving (to confess thy name)."
- *The righteous shall surround me*, In Hebrew, is *shall crown me*; that is, shall surround me, as wondering at God's goodness in David's deliverance
- Or it may mean, *they shall set the crown on mine head*

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- David ended his lament with hope and trust
- He had not yet experienced God's rescue, but he expected God to intervene and help him
- David began the Psalm with *complaint*; he closes confident of *praise* to come
- He anticipated giving thanks to God for His goodness to him
- David began with a great sense of isolation; he closes with confidence in coming companionship and support from the *righteous*
- He looked forward to rejoining God's people

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- This is a response of faith; the process of lamenting, of crying out to God, reshaped David's emotions
- In the face of the Great God, his fears weakened
- He knew God was his refuge and trusted that He would deliver him
- All of us encounter difficult periods in our lives
- We find ourselves afraid and struggling
- The reasons may be very different, but we can all relate to David's words when he cries out for God to set him free from his prison

God Has Been and Is His Only

Hope 142:5-7



- Many things imprison us, but the truth of God's Word remains unchanged
- Sometimes we can enter that wonderful space of almost tasting the victory that is ours before it even begins to unfold
- At other times, we experience what feels like the absence of God
- However, in both cases, the Lord is still our refuge and our strength
- His promises are true
- We still cry out to Him, knowing that, in the end, God will maintain the faith of His servants



Discussion

- What is the main theme of this Psalm?
- Why did David need the Lord's help?
- How did David demonstrate his faith and confidence in God?
- Why did David refer to the Lord as his "portion"?
- What sort of language did David use to describe his situation?



Discussion

- How was David's attitude honoring to God?
- In what specific ways should we imitate David's example in this Psalm?
- How does Psalm 142 explain the role of prayer during times of distress?
- How can we cultivate the same level of trust in God's deliverance that David demonstrates?