



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 143

Metropolitan Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *A Psalm of David*
- According to the title, David is the author of this Psalm
- There is no indication in the title as to the time or the occasion on which it was composed
- However, in the Septuagint version, and the Latin Vulgate, it is said to have been written *when Absalom his son persecuted him*
- In other word, it was composed on the rebellion of his son Absalom
- But some think it was written on the same occasion as Psalm 142, and at the same time when he was persecuted by Saul



Introduction

- This Psalm is numbered among the seven Repentant Psalms, (Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 130)
- These Psalms have in common an acknowledgment of sin (Psalm 32:5; Psalm 38:18; Psalm 51:2-4; Psalm 130:3) and a reference to deserved punishment (Psalm 6:1; Psalm 38:1; Psalm 102:10; Psalm 143:2)
- They are Psalms of confession and humility before God
- Psalm 143 was composed when David was in danger and in trouble on account of evil and powerful enemies
- But many think that the servant of God who speaks here in the Psalm is Israel, suffering in the prison of exile



Introduction

- In this Psalm we see David confesses his sins, suffers and is threatened by others, he feels weak and needs God
- Yet at the same time he knows God, who God is and what God has done
- He asks great things of God, he acknowledges the goodness of God and the glory of God, finds comfort and confidence in God, and yearns to serve God
- Here David is simultaneously crushed under the weight of his current trouble while he's confident in God who can rescue
- The Psalm consists of two equal divisions, separated by Selah



Introduction

- In the entire life of David, if there is one lesson we can learn from, it is his prayer life
- His communication with God in prayer has encouraged all believers through centuries
- When words failed, believers have used these prayers to raise their voice to the Lord in time of distress
- His deep intimate relationship with God granted him to pray such passionate expressive prayers
- This Psalm is one of the Psalms of the First Hour (Prime) prayer in the Book of Agpeya



Introduction

- St. Augustine comments on the title of this Psalm and says, “The title of the Psalm is, ‘To David himself, when his son was pursuing him.’ We know from the Books of Kings that this happened:...but we must recognize here another David, truly ‘strong in hand,’ which is the explanation of David, even our Lord Jesus Christ. For all those events of past time were figures of things to come. Let us seek then in this Psalm our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, announcing Himself beforehand in His prophecy, and foretelling what should happen at this time by things which were done long ago. For He Himself foretold Himself in the Prophets: for He is the Word of God.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6
- David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- As David begins, he asks God to hear him twice
- He says, *Hear my prayer...* and ...*Give ear to my supplications*
- A beginning like this shows us David's serious trouble
- He's not using exalted language, as soon as his mouth opens, his prayer begins with him immediately crying out
- But what is he crying out for?
- Mercy is David's desire here
- Many moments in David's life could fit this situation where he felt so pressed down by enemies or circumstances that he would beg the Lord for mercy

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- Because his life was filled with so much danger and difficulties, it is hard to link this Psalm to any one particular point of crisis
- It could be from the time before David was recognized as king, living as a fugitive from King Saul
- Or it could be from David's time as king, particularly when his son Absalom led a rebellion against him
- Prayer for David was a real plea made to a real God who could be appealed unto to *hear*, to *answer*, and to help
- David knows the Lord and he knows who He is and knows His character

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- He has lived near the Lord and lived with the Lord for many years
- From this David has a true knowledge of God
- But did he consider this knowledge of God merely an intellectual reality? Of course not
- Because David knows who God is, he uses this knowledge in prayer and asks God to be to him, in this troubled moment, what God is, faithful and righteous
- As God has revealed Himself as a God of mercy and forgiveness (Exodus 34:5-7), the psalmist can boldly plead for a merciful answer on the ground of *His righteousness and faithfulness*

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- His knowledge of the character and nature of God, shaped his prayer life
- David knew that God had made a covenant with His people and God would be faithful to it
- God's perfect righteousness provided David with additional assurance that God would uphold it
- Since God said He would be faithful to the covenant, David could pray with confidence
- David expected God to hear and answer him because of this relationship to God that is build on a covenant

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- God's righteousness here signifies His unwavering conformity to His own character; God is perfectly righteous
- Similarly, His faithfulness is the attribute which makes it impossible that He should be untrue to the covenant which He has made with His servants
- David asked God to act consistently with those attributes and to *answer* him
- David does not plead his own faith, but the faithfulness of God to His promises, *Your faithfulness*

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- *Do not enter into judgment with Your servant*, At the mention of God being a God of righteousness David now remembers himself, and he acknowledges himself to be unrighteous
- David understood that if God were to deal with him only on the basis of His righteousness, it could mean *judgment*
- So, he asked God to deal with him on the basis of mercy *do not enter into judgment* and understood that he appealed to God because the Lord is righteous, not because David was *righteous*
- David admits and confesses his unrighteousness
- David, before he prays for the removal of his trouble, prays for the forgiveness of his sin, and depends upon mere mercy for it

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- David knows that such judgment would find him guilty, as he, like everyone, has sinned, *“There is none righteous, no, not one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:10,23)
- According to St. John Chrysostom, God’s *righteousness* here means His lovingkindness and mercy
- As the church prays in the “Litany of the Departed” (For no one is pure and without blemish, even though his life on earth be a single day.)

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- In his life, David knew suffering of many kinds
- Here he spoke of the persecution and suffering of his *soul*
- Verses 3-4 take us to the main reason David is crying out to the Lord
- His enemy, either Saul, or Absalom his own son, persecuted him, or pursued him in order to take away his soul, or life
- In almost Job like language David describes this bitter trial, as if he were endlessly pursued, trampled on, crushed down, and thrown into darkness

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- How difficult on David's soul to see his beloved son Absalom become his enemy, and uses every possible way, not only to take away the throne from him, but even to seek his life, to kill him, and to humiliate him before the people
- *the enemy*, Satan, the enemy and avenger, who, "*walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" (1 Peter 5:8)
- *He has crushed my life to the ground*, brought him into a low, mean, and hopeless state, and near to death
- *He has made me dwell in darkness*, inside the cave, 2 Samuel 24:3; or in great affliction of body and mind, frequently signified by darkness, as prosperity is by light

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- According to St. Augustine, the devil has persecuted the Lord Jesus Christ
- He says, “Here our Head speaks for us. Manifestly both the devil persecuted the Soul of Christ and Judas the Soul of his Master: and now too the same devil remains to persecute the Body of Christ, and one Judas succeeds another.”
- St. John Chrysostom says, “While it is possible that this was said about Saul, enemy that he was, it is possible in a spiritual sense also to be about the enemy the devil: he does not cease his pursuit of those who belong to God.”

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- St. John Chrysostom asks, “So, how would we be relieved of this pursuit? If we were to find a place where he cannot enter.”
- *Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart within me is distressed*, So, his spirit fails and his heart is horrified at the circumstances he finds himself in
- It is sometimes the share of godly people to have their spirits for a time almost overwhelmed and their hearts mournful
- David was not only a great prophet, but a great soldier, and yet even he was sometimes ready to faint in a day of adversity
- He felt perplexed and distressed, lonely and afflicted

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- David spoke long before the greater Son of David, but these words could also be in the mouth of Jesus, especially in His Gethsemane agony
- In Gethsemane, before His betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus said: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”* (Matthew 26:38)
- St. Augustine says, “My soul is extremely sorrowful, even to death’. Here we hear one voice, going from the Head to the members; and from the members to the Head.”

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- Still, in the midst of all his troubles, David does not despair, *I remember the days of old* the great things which God has done for him in the past
- The recollection of God's wonderful works of old time makes him long for a new manifestation of God's power
- And these past mercies of God may also be what He has shown His people throughout the ages
- David's consideration of *the days of old* was not only a nostalgic longing for the past
- It was a remembrance of God's great *works*

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- There were probably mixed emotions within David as he remembered the *days of old*
- If he thought of the joy, the simplicity, and the goodness of how God met him and blessed him as a shepherd boy (even somewhat despised), it would bring some joy
- Yet it would also cause him some pain to consider how far away all that seemed in his present misery
- David did not remember his past as much as he remembered the Lord's past works
- For David, what made the past worth remembering was the work of the Lord

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- He thought carefully about what God had done; *meditate* and *muse* are words that speak of deep thought
- This is deep contemplation of God in the mind and heart
- Though crushed, David turns his attention to the Lord
- How? Verse 6 ends by saying David stretches out his hands for the Lord and thirsts for Him, but what did he do in such thirsting?
- He remembered, he meditated, and he pondered the wonderful works of God
- David here chases away his own troubled spirit by looking back to God's faithful care of His people

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- Thinking deeply about what God did with His hands made David respond with his *hands*, spreading them out before God in prayer and praise
- David praised God for what He had done in *the days of old*, and he prayed that God might draw close to him now
- The ache in David's soul did not drive him away from God
- It drove David to God in prayer, praise, and deep longing
- His persecuted soul sought after God with the intensity of thirst
- As a dry land, which wants water, splits, and as it were thirsts for rain, which is very refreshing to it; so, his soul thirsted after God

David Pleads for a Merciful Hearing 143:1-6



- St. Augustine says, “Rain upon me, says he, to bring forth from me good fruit. ‘For the Lord shall give sweetness, that our land may give her fruit.’ ‘I have stretched forth my hands to You; my soul is as a land without water,’ not to me, but ‘to You.’ I can thirst for You, I cannot water myself.”
- *Selah*; It was time to pause, to give time for inner prayer, and to divide the Psalm into two parts

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- Just as in verses 1 and 7 begins with quick and intense pleading for God to no longer delay and hide His face, but to save and save quickly
- David felt that his failing *spirit* could not last long without God's *answer* and intervention
- Experience had taught David that God always did things at just the right time, but the present crisis made him cry out, *Answer me speedily, O Lord*
- David knew what it was like to enjoy the sense of God's favor and blessing
- To feel that God might *hide* His face drove David into despair, so he pleaded to see the light of God's countenance

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- Much later, the Apostle Paul wrote: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31)
- When we live with the belief that God is for us, we are confident in the face of any adversary
- Yet if we sense that God may *hide* His *face from* us, we feel weak before any adversary
- David considered this to be the worst imaginable fate: to leave the land of the living and go to the pit of the grave
- *Lest I be like those who go down into the pit*, may mean to look pale, become lifeless and spiritless, or like a dead man

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- He felt that he could not go on without a continued sense of the favor and blessing of God
- For as in the favor of God is life, His absence is as death
- Communion with God is so precious and valuable to a true heart that its absence makes the man feel as though he were ready to die and perish utterly
- David's longing to know God hasn't left him, so, he pleads to be reminded of God's faithfulness to His people, of God's faithfulness to him

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- St. John Chrysostom comments on *Answer me speedily*, and say, “What are you saying? Are you urging the physician to his cure? Not at all: this too is a custom with spirits suffering tribulation, people in pain urging on the physicians even if the time does not require it, and quickly bringing forward relief.”
- And according to him too, the true cause for God’s hiding His face sometimes is our sins
- *For in You do I trust*, His utter trust in God gives him a claim to be helped
- David needed to hear a good word from God, and asked that he would be *caused* to hear it

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David needed to hear something of God's great mercy, His *lovingkindness*
- The present urgency of his concerns, and unrest of his spirit, made him deaf of hearing God's voice
- Therefore, he begs, Lord, do not only kindly speak to me, but *Cause me to hear*
- He is beginning to look ahead and seek direction
- *in the morning*, is already a sign of this by its admission that the night is not endless

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- God speaks to us by His word and we should desire and endeavor to *hear His lovingkindness* that we may set that always before us: *Cause me to hear it in the morning*, every morning
- He is asking to have his waking thoughts to be of God's lovingkindness, so the pleasing enjoyment of that may abide upon his spirit all day long
- His plea is, *For in You do I trust* and in God only and no one else
- David appealed to God on the basis of his trust and surrender to Him
- It was as if David prayed, *Lord, I am genuinely depending on You. Please do not let me down; speak to me and guide me*

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David confessed that he did not *know the way*, and that he needed God to *cause* him to *know the way*
- He did not only need the love of God – he also needed the guidance of God
- Even in the most distressing time of his troubles, deeply hurt and broken at the uprising of Absalom his son, David knew that God would lead him as 2 Samuel 15:25 says, “*If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place.*”
- His confidence was in the Lord’s plans over his life

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David's enemies had persecuted his soul (verse 3)
- He prayed not only for God's encouragement, but also for His defense against these *enemies*
- David has many enemies, many of whom he could not never defeat
- But he knew that no one could penetrate through the defense that God had put around him
- Every time Saul caught up with him, David thought that was the end
- But God proved that He was sufficient for him

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- *In You I take shelter*, This was a beautiful statement of faith
- David would not take *shelter* in sinful pleasures, in the distractions of the world attractions, in positive thinking, in self-reliance, in bitterness, or in revenge
- David was determined to *take shelter* in the Lord

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- Wanting to do what is right, David pleaded, *Teach me to do Your will*
- David knew that God's will and desire was the best, not his own
- He also knew that he had to be taught to do God's will, it would not just automatically come
- So, David is asking God to Teach him in the present urgent difficulty to do *Your will* that which God approves; which will be wise
- Because our lives meet all sorts of unknowns, we need a Teacher that is there whenever we need

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- St. John Chrysostom says, “He did not say simply, ‘Teach me Your will but to do Your will, that is, lead me to its actual execution: there is need from grace from on high and instruction from there to tread the way leading to virtue – not that we are lying idle, but contributing also what is ours to contribute.”
- He desired that God’s good Spirit would lead him *in the land of uprightness*
- The Spirit would compel him to conduct himself in a godly manner
- The Holy Spirit speaks in soft voice to those who are able to hear Him

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- It is befitting of the believer in the midst of his tribulation to cry out to God to grant him the work of His Holy Spirit, who guides and leads him to do according to His divine will; to lead him on a level path, to reach the land of the living
- David was not only looking to God just to fix his problems and for temporary blessings
- He was seeking God Himself
- Very often people tend to love the gift (Whatever one is praying for) more than the Giver

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- St. Augustine says, “The psalmist says, ‘Your good Spirit,’ not my bad one, ‘Your good Spirit shall lead me into the right land.’ For my bad spirit has led me into a crooked land. And what have I deserved? What can be regarded as my good works without Your aid, through which I might obtain and be worthy to be led by Your Spirit into the right land?”
- As in the opening of the Psalm (verses 1-2), David again bases his plea for help (including justice on enemies) on the fact that he is God's servant (verses 11-12)—stressing here God's *mercy*
- God has made promises of steadfast love and help to those who are His servants

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David prayed for *revival*, for a renewal of life and vitality
- Yet he prayed this not for his benefit, but *for Your name's sake*
- God had revealed Himself to be a loving and just God
- Therefore, on the basis of God's name or the kind of God He is, David prayed to be preserved alive
- In keeping with God's righteousness, he prayed that his *soul* or he himself would be delivered from *trouble*
- David feels crushed yes, but he is confident in the Lord; why?
- Because God's lovingkindness; he knows God will bring him out of this trouble and knows that the many enemies of his soul do not stand a chance

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David knew that his rescue would bring glory to God, so he could pray for deliverance on that basis
- He is asking God in His goodness towards him, to remove those enemies whose conduct towards him has been described in verses 3 and 4
- This is David's ordinary prayer with respect to his enemies, whom he counts as God's adversaries
- He could ask God to *destroy all those who afflict my soul*, leaving vengeance to God against those who persecuted his soul
- David confidently made his appeal because of being God's servant
- David's confidence comes in the character of God and in His grace-given relationship to God

David Prays for a Speedy Deliverance 143:7-12



- David knows God's faithfulness and knows that God will fulfill His promises, and deal with David's adversaries (Psalm 54:5,73:27,94:23)
- St. John Chrysostom says, "Not because I am worthy, he is saying, but on account of Your lovingkindness free me from those warring against me...By its nature, prayer is not sufficient on its own, for the Jews prayed and received the response, 'Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.' (Isaiah 1:15)...aware of this, therefore, let us not simply pray, but along with our prayers let us render ourselves worthy of receipt so as to gain both present and future things."



Discussion

- Explain David's situation in Psalm 143. Why was he desperate for God?
- What does this Psalm teach us about our weakness and the reality of spiritual warfare?
- In this Psalm, how do you see David pursuing God more than anything (including answers from God)?
- What kind of language is used to describe David's longing for the Lord?



Discussion

- In verses 7-12, how do you see David expressing confidence even though he's in a time of desperate need?
- Why does David reflect on God's past deeds during his moment of despair?
- How did David show his trust in God?
- What was David's motivation in asking for God's deliverance?