



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 144

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Introduction

- This Psalm has the title *A Psalm of David*
- And according to the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic, the title is, *A Psalm of David against Goliath*
- The Hebrew, and all the versions, attribute this Psalm to David
- Most believe that it was written after he has come to the throne, and was a king over all Israel
- And some say it was written on the account of his deliverance from his son Absalom
- It is the last in the sequence of five Psalms of David seeking rescue from enemies



Introduction

- The four preceding Psalms seem to have been written by David before his enthronement, when he was persecuted by Saul
- And Psalm 144 refers to threatening foreign enemies in a time of war or a threat of war
- It contains a number of similarities with David's great victory song found in 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18
- In general, the Psalm may be described as the prayer of a king for victory and blessing
- It expresses David's heart for the nation in both war and peace



Introduction

- It is a prayer asking God to powerfully fight for King David and on his behalf
- It is a prayer Psalm that anticipates great blessing to follow after the Lord goes to fight for David and Israel
- A prayer Psalm that begins with praise, praise that the Lord is David's Rock
- It is one of the Psalms of battles, that helps us in our spiritual warfare against the devil and his hosts
- We are in need of the Lord Himself to lead the battle by His cross, and to train us on the spiritual battles



Introduction

- St. Augustine comments on the title and says, “The title of this Psalm is brief in number of words, but heavy in the weight of its mysteries. To David himself against Goliath. This battle was fought in the time of our fathers...David put five stones in his scrip, he hurled but one. The five Books were chosen, but unity conquered. Then, having smitten and overthrown him, he took the enemy's sword, and with it cut off his head. This our David also did, He overthrew the devil with his own weapons: and when his great ones, whom he had in his power, by means of whom he slew other souls, believe, they turn their tongues against the devil, and so Goliath's head is cut off with his own sword.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- God's Greatness 144:1-2
- Man's Insignificance 144:3-4
- God's Power 144:5-8
- Man's Praise 144:9-10
- God's Blessing 144:11-15



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- David praises God and offers Him thanks for the singular favor bestowed on him, in enabling him to conquer the giant Goliath
- *Blessed be the Lord my Rock*, Who is author and giver of his natural body strength, and of his mind, and of all the spiritual strength he had, to bear up under afflictions and trials, to perform duty, and withstand enemies
- The Lord is the Rock to whom David fled for shelter, when in distress; and on whom he built his faith
- David was a remarkable warrior
- He killed many men in hand-to-hand combat, as described in 1 Samuel 17:48-50 and 18:26-27



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- Training is an essential part of success as a soldier, and David understood that it was the *Lord* who had trained his *hands for war* and his *fingers for battle*
- God took David from being a shepherd, and made him a soldier; and from being the leader of a flock of sheep, to be a general of armies
- David whose hands and fingers had been used to play the harp and lyre, were taught how to handle the sword, the bow, the shield, and spear
- He uses the word *trains* instead of strengthens, because the victory was due more to skill than to strength



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- For, as we read in 1 Samuel 17:50, *"So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him"*
- It certainly required no small amount of skill to let a stone fly from a sling so as to hit an adversary in one particular vital spot
- David, however, in his wisdom, does not attribute to his own skill, or self-confidence, but entirely to the gift of God
- In like manner, we need skill rather than strength in the spiritual battles we have daily with the devil
- And Christ Himself, of whom David was the type, conquered the devil more by His wisdom than by His power



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- It was by His humility that Christ laid His proud and cruel enemy powerless
- Therefore, David, instead of saying, *Who strengths my hands*, says, *Who trains my hands*, which he repeats when he says, *And my fingers for battle*
- St. John Chrysostom says, "We have particular need of grace from on high, when we are arrayed in battle against opposing forces described by St. Paul, 'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.' (Ephesians 6:12)."



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- In five expressions David tells the order in which God helped him to the victory, and in which he will help us too, if we put our entire confidence in Him
- First, God in His *lovingkindness* (mercy) looked upon David; for God's mercy is the primary source of all our blessings, and precedes all merit whatsoever; and he, therefore, places *My lovingkindness* first
- He loved and valued God for being his *fortress*, his *high tower*, his *deliverer*, his *shield*, his *refuge*, and his conquering victory
- Yet first among all those was the gift from God of love, mercy, and faithfulness



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- In this Psalm David confesses who he had found God to be
- He is *my Rock, My lovingkindness and my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer, My shield*
- Having been thus called and taken by the hand through God's mercy, he looked towards Him, and through hope and prayer fled to Him, and thus God became his refuge, *my fortress*
- Third, the name of the Lord, which is Himself, is a strong tower, where His righteous ones that flee to Him are safe; and is a *high* one, where they are out of the reach of all their enemies
- Fourthly, He delivered him, after having thus supported him from the imminent danger, and thus, he became his *deliverer*



God's Greatness 144:1-2

- *My shield*, After having so delivered him, He protected, and continued to protect him as long as the fight lasted
- God surely is *My lovingkindness and my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer, My shield*
- *the One in whom I take refuge*, Having done more for him than he could have ever hoped for, therefore, he will put his whole hope and confidence in Him
- According to St. Augustine the people whom a man needs God to subdue under him, are the senses, emotions, and thoughts, namely, his inner man



Man's Insignificance 144:3-4

- In the first two verses David exalted God's goodness, great strength and victory
- In light of that, it amazed David that God would have an interest in him, or in humanity in general
- Psalm 8:4 asks the same questions from a slightly different perspective
- Here the emphasis is on the Lord as a warrior that none can oppose
- In Psalm 8:4 the emphasis is on the power of God as Creator and sustainer of the universe



Man's Insignificance 144:3-4

- *what is man*, a creature, made of the dust of the earth, is but dust and ashes as Abraham described himself, (Genesis 18:27)
- A sinful creature, that drinks up iniquity like water, (Job 15:16)
- And yet the Lord not only knows him, as He is the omniscient God, but takes notice of him in a way of providence, and in a way of grace
- David is wondering: What did God see in man when He condescended to let Himself so down, and reveal so much about His wonderful mysteries and attributes to him?



Man's Insignificance 144:3-4

- *Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?* David used the common method of repetition to bring emphasis to the concept of God's unusual and even unexpected care for humanity
- He now tells why he is so full of admiration; it is because man is so insignificant, and his very insignificance of such short duration, *His days are like a passing shadow*
- Thus, drawing the greatest possible contrast between the nothingness of man, and the greatness of God
- God is the fullness of all good, and is so at all times, and never subject to change or diminution



Man's Insignificance 144:3-4

- While man can be compared only with that which is utterly vain - which is emptiness - which is nothing
- David knew how temporary human life was
- It was as fleeting as a *breath* or a *passing shadow*
- All this applies to man in regard of his temporal life alone, as contrasted with that of God, because, in other respects, man is a being of great importance, inasmuch as he is created to the image and likeness of God, in order to know and to love Him
- And a being for whom the only Begotten Son of God did not hesitate to shed His blood for many for the remission of sins, (Matthew 26:28)



Man's Insignificance 144:3-4

- Though man should therefore, when compared to God, acknowledge himself to be no more than dust and ashes
- Yet, whenever the devil would tempt him by the suggestion of the evil desires that reduce him to a lower level, he should reflect on his own dignity, and seek rather to desire the place intended for him among the Angels
- St. Ambrose says, "Man, created in the image of God, could not be counted as a breath; whereas he who lost this image by falling into sin, and going down into material desires, such a person is positively counted as a breath."



God's Power 144:5-8

- David used words and images from God's appearance on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20) to give the sense of awe and even terror connected with God's presence
- The heavens are the Lord's, and He who elevated them can *bow* them
- His servant is struggling against hostile vicious enemies, and he finds no help in men, therefore he entreats the Lord to come down to his rescue
- The prayer is, that God would come to his relief as if in *smoke*; in the wrath and rage of the storm



God's Power 144:5-8

- In spiritual sense he prays to God to display His power in regard of such people who, as they will not be influenced by the love of justice or reverence for their Creator, may be prevented from sin and wrong, through the fear of punishment
- As if he is telling God that “since all Your favors have not had the effect of reducing the pride of man, to acknowledge or to fear You, make Yourself known to them by Your dark and gloomy clouds, by Your fire from heaven, by Your lightnings and thunder that cause mankind so to fear and tremble”
- In like manner, the church, the body of Christ, is pressing in prayer for the final completion of all her hope



God's Power 144:5-8

- She wishes for the glorious day, when her God and Savior shall bow the heavens, and come down to judgment, causing the mountains to smoke; when she we will be delivered from every enemy
- According to St. Jerome, “God *flash forth* His *lightning* on the haughty souls, not to destroy them, but to scatter them; like what He did to those who attempted to build a tower in which to take refuge from the wrath of God, when He confused their language and scattered them over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:9)”
- David asked that the same God of majestic awe would fight for him, sending forth *lightning* like *arrows* against the *foreigners* who fought against David with lies and *falsehood*



God's Power 144:5-8

- *Stretch out Your hand from above*, David is asking God, who is in the high heaven, to employ and display His power in his deliverance
- Rescue him out of great afflictions, which, for quantity and quality, are like many waters, overflowing and overwhelming; (Isaiah 43:2)
- David is deep in trouble and only God can save him
- According to some church fathers, *Stretch out Your hand* refers to the hand of the Son, which He stretched through His incarnation, on the cross for the sake of our salvation



God's Power 144:5-8

- Or out of the hands of enemies, many, mighty, and strong, whom he compares to waters
- During David's days as a fugitive from Saul, he had many men who informed against him so they might gain favor with King Saul (1 Samuel 22:6-10, 23:19-20)
- David also likely faced whisperers and liars against his character when he was king
- *foreigners*, either Gentiles, people of a strange nation, and of a strange language, and of strange religion who worship a strange god



God's Power 144:5-8

- Or by their actions they proved that they were truly *foreigners* from the people of God and rejected the Lord, the God of Israel
- According to St. John Chrysostom, *foreigners* refer to those alienated from truth
- David faced an enemy that was cruel, deceptive and powerful
- He needed his Lord to come down and save him
- Verse 7 may be applied to the sorrows and sufferings of Jesus Christ
- He gives a description of those enemies by saying they were sinners in word and deed, *Whose mouth speaks lying words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*



God's Power 144:5-8

- They speak lies and deception instead of God's truth, or His law, or anything good
- And *whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*, does nothing but steal, oppression of the poor, slaughter, adultery etc.
- St. John Chrysostom says, "Do you see whom he calls foreign? Those living in sin, those loving injustice, those uttering folly, those speaking nothing useful. Consequently, recognize foreigners from their mouth, from their deeds, as Christ also said, 'By their fruits you will recognize them.'"



Man's Praise 144:9-10

- The psalmist returns to his original theme of the praise of God (verses 1 and 2), and promises a *new song*
- New victories and new deliverance required a *new song*
- God's love and help for David were always new, so his praise would also be
- In the midst of his complaints concerning the power and deceit of his enemies, he praises God
- He promises to give thanks for the victory which he is confident will be granted
- David was a skilled musician (1 Samuel 16:18), and he played his *harp of ten strings* as he sang praises to God



Man's Praise 144:9-10

- St. Augustine says, "A new song is of grace; 'a new song' is of the new man; 'a new song' is of the New Testament. But lest you should think that grace departs from the law, whereas rather by grace the law is fulfilled, 'upon a psaltery of ten strings will I sing unto You.' Upon the law of ten commandments: therein may I sing to You; therein may I rejoice to You; therein may 'I sing to You a new song;' for, 'Love is the fulfilling of the law.' But they who have not love may carry the psaltery, sing they cannot. Contradiction cannot make my psaltery to be silent."



Man's Praise 144:9-10

- And St. John Chrysostom says, "In those days, they used musical instruments to sing praises; but now, we use our own body for this purpose. We can sing with the eyes, and not just with the tongue; and with the hands and feet, etc...When we practice good deeds, we honor and praise God;...When our eyes do not look at improper scenes;...when the hands do not stretch to steal, but to give;...when the ears are used to hear Psalms and spiritual songs of praise;...when the feet walk to the church;...and when the heart does not produce deceit, but love; the diverse body members transform into a harp of ten strings, and sing a new song, not by words, but by works, as well."



Man's Praise 144:9-10

- *The One who gives salvation to kings*, Which is the reason of singing the new song to the Lord, or this is the matter of it
- He is the Savior of all men
- David had felt God's help many times as a humble shepherd boy (1 Samuel 17:34-36) and as a despised fugitive (1 Samuel 23:24-29)
- He was sure that God would also help him as king, rescuing him *from the deadly sword*
- Even *kings*, with all their armies, have no hope but in God
- They seem to be the most powerful of men, but they are, like all other people, wholly dependent on



Man's Praise 144:9-10

- Those whom the Lord sets up, he will keep up
- Kings, from their important position, are exposed to special danger, and when their lives and their thrones are preserved, they should give the Lord the glory of it
- In his many battles David would have perished, had not God's care preserved him
- He had by his courage wrought salvation for Israel, but he lays his honors at the feet of his Lord and Preserver
- *Who delivers David*, He speaks in the present tense for this was an act which covered his whole life
- *His servant*, accepting this as the highest title he had attained



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- David here repeated the idea from earlier in the Psalm verses 7 and 8
- He wants to show the intensity and persistence of the request, and the danger David was in
- The presence and destructive work of these foreign liars and false speakers were of great concern to him, and he pleaded with God to *rescue* him
- Verses 12-15 are a description of the prosperity of Israel under the protection and blessing of God
- David prayed for a series of blessings that would come among him upon God's deliverance and upon God's people



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- Blessed with children in the home; well-rooted and flourishing *sons*, and stable and gracious respectable *daughters*
- He desires that their *sons* may be like strong, well rooted, young trees, which promise great things
- If they do not grow in their youth, when will they grow?
- Daughters unite families as corner-stones join walls together, and at the same time they adorn them as polished stones garnish the structure into which they are built
- Home becomes a palace when the daughters are maids of honor, and the sons are nobles in spirit; then the father is a king, and the mother a queen



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- Some interpret this verse as if this and what follows were a description of the families, estates, substance, and outward happiness of wicked men, the enemies of David, *the foreigners* he desired to be delivered from
- These words may express the vain boastings of these men, and explain what is meant by the vanity their mouth spoke
- They are the persons who neither know nor care for anything but the pleasures of this world, the prosperity of their sons and daughters, the abundance of their flocks and herds, and their produce, and the enjoyment of all those things in peace



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- According to the scholar Origen, the faithful believers enjoy sons, as a symbol of the works of the Spirit, and daughters as a symbol of those of the body
- Being sanctified, man enjoys spiritual fruits of both the soul and the body, both working together in harmony under the leadership of the Holy Spirit; that the works of the Spirit become like full-grown plants, or spiritual trees in a heavenly paradise; and the works of the body become like holy pillars; that man would become a temple holy for God, where the Spirit of God dwells
- *That our barns may be full, Supplying all kinds of produce, And famine will not be a concern in this kingdom (Deuteronomy 28:4)*



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- The barns in the land will be overflowing with more than enough for everyone
- *our sheep*, They are fruitful in young abounding in their goings forth
- They are creatures that breed and increase much; when they stand well, a few soon become a thousand, and these thousands produce ten thousands
- They seem countless, as they go out to pasture
- Spiritually speaking by the work of the Holy Spirit, man would become the field of God; his barns would be full of every holy produce



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- *our oxen may be well laden*, God will also bless the livestock in great abundance
- Another blessing is that the cattle producing abundantly or multiplying
- *there be no breaking in or going out*, of the enemy into the land to invade it, into cities and houses to steal and ruin them
- That property may be safe everywhere
- *or going out*, of the city to meet the enemy and fight
- The image is that of security, peace, order, prosperity
- There is neither noise nor confusion, but all is tranquil and peaceful



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- All is peaceful and prosperous; the throne is occupied efficiently, and even the cattle in their stalls are *well laden*
- David prayed as a wise and caring king, asking God for blessing upon his people in their common, everyday lives
- Yet such blessings could only come to God's covenant people when they were loyal to God as they had promised to be loyal (Exodus 24:3-8)
- When they looked to God as their only God and Master, rejecting all the idols of the nations, the promised blessings were granted – and God's people were *happy*



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- Prosperity and peace, such as are referred to in the previous verses, are, and must be, the result of pure worship and true relationship with God
- It is desirable to have temporal prosperity, but the true happiness of God's people does not consist therein, nor in any thing common with the people of the world, but in this unique privilege, that the living, true, and blessed God is their God
- He is their God by special relation, and that they enjoy His favor, love, and grace, though they may not have abundance of this world's goods and may be in a state of great poverty, reproach, and affliction



God's Blessing 144:11-15

- St. John Chrysostom says, “Do you see the man’s virtue? I mean, after citing all forms of wealth and touching on them by name, he then presents the verdict of the majority on them, he is unaffected by any human view from these people, and does not consider the owners privileged, but rather passes them all by to bestow beatitude on the true treasure. In other words, he is saying, while other people declare the owners of these goods blessed, I declare blessed *the people whose God is the Lord...*the other things pass away and move on, whereas this blessing abides constantly.”



Discussion

- What does Psalm 144 teach us about our reliance on God in times of conflict?
- How does David's depiction of God in verses 1-2 provide comfort during times of strife?
- How does David portray human life compared to God's eternal existence in verses 1-4?
- Why do you think David repeatedly emphasizes his enemies' deceitful words?



Discussion

- How does the imagery in verses 5-8 help express the magnitude of God's power?
- In what ways does David's "new song" in verses 9-10 reflect his faith in God?
- What does it mean for a nation to be "blessed" as per the last verse of this Psalm?
- In what ways does Psalm 144 promote a perspective of hope amid adversity?