



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 148

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Introduction

- This Psalm is without a title, and it is not certain by whom, or on what occasion, it was composed
- In the Septuagint version, it is ascribed, like the previous two Psalms, to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah
- This Psalm, according to some commentators, seems to have been written about the same time, and by the same person, as the preceding Psalm; even by David, when he was in peace, and at rest from all his enemies; and the kingdom of Israel was in a well settled and prosperous condition
- And some think the occasion was the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the captivity, and the dedication of the temple



Introduction

- And some take it as prophecy about the times of the Messiah, of whom David was a type
- It will have its accomplishment in the latter day, when there will be just occasion for all creatures, in heaven and earth, to praise the Lord; which the Evangelist John, in vision, saw and heard them doing, Revelation 5:13
- Psalm 148 is the third of five “Alleluia” Psalms at the end of the Holy Book of Psalms (Psalms 146-150)
- Each of these Psalms begins and ends with “Praise the Lord” (Alleluia)



Introduction

- Alleluia occurs twelve times in Psalm 148, calling on all creation to praise God
- As a hymn of praise, this is the most beautiful wonderful and inspiring Psalm in the whole book
- The psalmist invites not only all humanity but all creation to praise God
- The purpose of creation, as portrayed here, is to bring glory to God and fulfill His divine plan
- Every aspect of nature reflects His greatness and invites us to actively participate in giving Him praise through our lives and actions



Introduction

- No one is exempt from the universal call to praise in Psalm 148
- Every living being has a role in honoring God's creation through worship
- This Psalm was written for liturgical use in the Jewish worship
- Psalms 148, 149, and 150 occupy a special place in the Coptic church, being the fourth 'Hos' (praise) in the daily vespers and the midnight prayers
- Psalm 148 may be divided into two distinct sections, each calling upon a particular realm of creation to praise the Lord



Introduction

- First, verses 1-6 call upon the inhabitants of the heavenly realm to praise God: angels and hosts, sun and moon, stars, the heavens of heavens, and the waters over the heavens
- Second, verses 7-14, the call is addressed to all the dwellers on the earth to unite in that praise
- Using language similar of Job 38 and Genesis 1, the psalmist calls sea, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, creeping things and flying things, kings, and men and women, old and young to join in the praise



Introduction

- Every element, every aspect of creation is to join in the praise
- Isaiah also did this, when he said: *“Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted.”*
- St. Augustine says, “The subject of our meditation in this present life should be the praises of God; for the everlasting exaltation of our life hereafter will be the praise of God, and none can become fit for the life hereafter, who has not practiced himself for it now. So then now we praise God, but we pray to Him too. Our praise is marked by joy, our prayer by groans.”



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- Praise from the Heavens 148:1-6
- Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- Like each of the last five Psalms in the Holy Book of Psalms, Psalm 148 begins and ends with *Alleluia*, which is both a shout of praise to God and an encouragement to praise Him
- The worship of God begins in the heavens
- He is asking those who dwell in heaven begin the praise
- Psalm 19 told us that *the heavens declare the glory of God* by their very nature and being
- Here the psalmist speaks to the heavens that they continue this praise
- It seems strange that the psalmist would call for the heavens to praise God

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- The heavens have no clear voice, no will, and yet they are called to *praise the Lord*
- St. Augustine respond by saying, “but yet, because they also are good, and properly arranged in their proper order, and form part of the beauty of the universe, which God created, though they themselves with voice and heart praise not God, yet when they are considered by those who have understanding, God is praised in them; and, as God is praised in them, they themselves too in a manner praise God.”
- The heavens are the heights, and therefore men must lift up their souls above the world unto *heavens*, and *on things above*

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- The angels, as residing in the highest heavens, get the first invitation
- The words *Praise Him* are not used in a spirit of command or exhortation, as if the Angels were deficient in their duty
- It is spoken in a spirit of invitation and strong affection by the psalmist, who is highly excited and inflamed with the love of God
- Praise is the constant task of the *angels* surrounding God's throne (Revelation 4:8)
- The company of faithful angels is like a great army, *all His hosts*
- The church fathers are unanimous that *His hosts* refer to the Cherubim, Seraphim, and the other angels

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- The angels are called *“The multitude of the heavenly host”* (Luke 2:13)
- According to St. Jerome, as the psalmist starts by the heavenly hosts praising God, he count this as a call addressed to everyone of us, to become as one of them, and praise the Lord; For he, who opposes God, like the devil, will not be able to praise
- From the angels, who, as being endowed with reason and intelligence, praise God in the strict sense of the word, he descends to the heavenly bodies who do not offer that intellectual praise they are incapable of

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- But still praise Him by reason of their greatness, splendor, and beauty, just as every beautiful work contributed to the credit of its maker
- They praise God by doing what they were created to do
- The sun gives light to the day time
- The moon and stars give light in the night
- *sun and moon*, The most visible and glorious objects in the heavens, as apparent to the eyes of people
- They all praise the Lord, being the work of His hands, revealing His wisdom, might, and goodness, as their Creator

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- *all you stars of light*, Each one has something special to it for which to praise God: and the entire groups should join in one chorus of praise
- *The sun, the moon and the stars* were considered by other people as individual gods and were worshiped as such
- The words of the psalmist here reflect the biblical creation theology of Genesis 1:5, “*God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*”
- *The sun, the moon, and the stars* are not gods to be worshiped but objects created by God and are called upon to worship God

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- *heavens of heavens*, the highest and most glorious heavens, the place of God's throne and glorious presence, as it is used, in Deuteronomy 10:14, 1 Kings 8:27, Nehemiah 9:6, and Psalm 115:16
- It may be referring to the idea that there is one heaven rising above another, (Psalm 68:33; 1 Kings 8:27)
- *"But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?"* (2 Chronicles 2:6)
- *heavens of heavens*, May also means all the heavens, which are made by the Lord, and they declare the glory of His power, wisdom, and goodness

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- *waters above the heavens*, divided by the firmament from the waters below; and are no other than the thick clouds that hang above in the air, (Genesis 1:6-7)
- Men have reason to praise God, not only that these waters do not drown the earth, but that they do water it and make it fruitful
- Then the psalmist presents in the following two verses, the reasons why all those things should praise God
- It is because they were all made by Him
- *For He commanded and they were created*, They were made without any labor, by one word or command brought from nonexistence to existence

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- St. John Chrysostom says, “The amazing beauty of these creatures confirm the fact that they are indeed made by a Creator, and did not exist on their own.”
- Verse 6 probably refers to the boundaries or limits God placed on all creation, so that each part has its place
- The expression, *forever and ever*, means *for all time* while heaven and earth endure - but does not imply an absolute perpetuity
- He has made them firm, stable, enduring
- All the creatures that praised God at first for their creation must praise Him still for their continued establishment

Praise from the Heavens

148:1-6



- St. John Chrysostom says, “And for proof that He also governs what was made, the inspired author himself shows in turn in the words, *He also established them forever and ever.*”
- The word rendered decree here seems to be used in the sense of limit or bound
- The idea is, that He has bound them by a fixed law; He has established laws which they are compelled to observe
- St. Augustine comments on *a decree* and says, “What sort of command have things in heaven and the holy angels received? What sort of command has God given them? What, but that they praise Him? Blessed are they whose business is to praise God!”



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- The first part of this Psalm called upon things in the heavens to give praise to God
- He now passes to the world below
- *Earth* must join with heaven in the praise of God
- All things in the *sea* and all the phenomenon of weather, *fire and hail, snow, clouds, wind* should praise God, *fulfilling His word*
- *great sea creatures*, may mean great fish, whales, sea dragons, or serpents
- St. Augustine says, “We may not imagine the dragons as forming choirs to praise God...but when we look at them, we meditate in Him who created such great creatures”



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- By *fire*, in this combination, we must understand lightning
- Let the *Stormy wind*, which seems to be so little under any control, praise Him by showing how obedient it is to His will, and how exactly it carries out His plans and purpose
- *Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind*, Are in perfect submission to His laws
- Though apparently so fierce, raging, and lawless, it carries out His plans, and pauses when He commands it
- This is in fact an act of praise as it proclaims His power and His authority



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- St. Augustine says, “Although for the foolish, all those things seem to happen haphazardly. Yet they are actually ‘fulfilling His word.’”
- The psalmist adds *fulfilling His word*, with a view to let us see that all those accidents, that are looked upon by man as so many adversities, come from the hand of God, who makes use of them as so many instruments of His justice or of His mercy to punish the wicked or to prevent the just from sin
- And, therefore, that they do not come from chance, nor should they be called tribulations but blessings, being the instruments of a good and gracious God



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- Mountains, trees and animals in all their natural wonder also join in the chorus of praise
- Though they cannot speak, they all declare the plan of the Master Designer
- What seem to us of benefit or of no benefit, all testify to the wisdom of the Creator
- The mountains and the hills which, sometimes, seem to man as obstacles; or the fruitless trees in the wilderness, which seem of no benefit; all of them present blessings to man
- *Beasts and all cattle*, even by the *beasts* that run wild, *and all cattle* that are tame and in the service of man



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- Wild and tame; they are all God's creation supported and supplied by Him
- *Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and flying fowl*, embraces all the highest and lowest
- The lowest worm that crawls and the bird that soars, these all have voices to praise God
- He calls upon and challenges them all to praise God, not that they are capable of any such thing, but that man, by reflecting on their use and benefit to him, may praise God, and return Him due thanks for them



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- After the whole creation has been called upon to praise God, man, for whom the whole was made; man, the last and most perfect work of God; man, that has been since redeemed by the blood of the Son of God incarnate, is exhorted to join and fill up the universal chorus of heaven and earth
- God's praise should be proclaimed by all who are made in His image
- He invites all mankind to praise God, and he mentions three different classes of people in respect of power, sex, and age
- *Kings of the earth and all peoples*, Those who command and those who obey



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- And, as all those who do command are not equal in authority, he adds, *princes, and all judges of the earth*
- St. John Chrysostom says, “he says it is necessary to offer thanks to God for the existence of kings and for the existence of judges: in His care for the good order of human beings and to prevent their acting in a manner worse than brute beasts, God granted them rulers and kings to act like a driver or a pilot. So, if you are one of the rulers, give thanks to the loving God for being the recipient of such care; if you are one of the ruled, likewise give thanks for having someone to care for you and not allow you to be the object of the wiles of the wicked.”



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- *Young men and maidens*, which includes the sexes, *the old men and children* to comprehend all ages
- St. John Chrysostom says, “If you have reached old age, if you are young, give thanks to God: this in particular is the message of this Psalm in every respect, the need to praise Him for everything, be you ruler, be you the people. Hence, he indicates this as well in saying all peoples: be you young, he is saying, be you old, be you woman, be you man.”
- Why all these should *praise the name of the Lord*, For there is no other name truly exalted and worthy of all praise, but the name of God



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- In the conclusion of this section (verses 13-14), two reasons are given for all to join in the praise of the name of the Lord; He is Who He is
- First is that *His name alone is exalted...above the earth and heavens*
- His name designates Him alone, in contrast to the created realm, as eternal and uncreated, having life in Himself
- Moreover, He is the very Creator and Sovereign Ruler of all His creation
- There is no other being that deserves the worship, honor, and praise that God deserves



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- His glory covered the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise; therefore His name alone is exalted
- Created things, however great, when compared with God's greatness, are insignificant
- And whatever greatness or excellence they may be possessed of they have entirely from Him, who alone is called, and justly is, the Most High
- In saying *Let them praise* the psalmist command all and restates the universal obligation of all of God's creation to demonstrate their faithfulness by praising Him



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- He deserves such praise from all things on earth because He is immeasurably greater and more glorious than anything else
- His glory is not only above the earth, but even above the heavens
- Praise God not because of what He has done in creating all things, but because of who God is in Himself
- The second basis for praise here is God's exalting of *the horn* (symbolizing strength) of His covenant people, His saints
- Great as God is, His greatness does not separate Him from His human creatures
- On the contrary, it makes the union between Himself and them closer



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- He bestows benefits on His people and increase their glory and their strength, and set them up above their enemies
- He gives them power and prosperity
- He selected them as His own people, gave them divine laws, written with His own finger, and cared for them with a special providence
- Spiritually when He increases their spiritual strength
- *His saints*, all those dedicated and consecrated to Him
- *the children of Israel* especially when they come nearer to God through true knowledge and faith, true worship, and love



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- This, however, as St. Augustine properly observes, applies not to *the children of Israel* according to the flesh, but according to the spirit
- For *the children of Israel* being stiff necked never made any approach to God, as St. Stephen reproached them, (Acts 5:51)
- And the Apostle St. Paul in Romans 9:6-7, points out who are the true children of Israel when he says, “*For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’*”
- Not those who are the children of the flesh are the children of God, but those that are the children of the promise



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- And in the same epistle chapter 4:12, he tells them that they were the children of Abraham *“who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.”*
- Nor should we exclude all the children of Israel according to the flesh, for in such case we would exclude the prophets and the Apostles; we exclude those only who are Israelites according to the flesh alone
- So, *the children of Israel* are the faithful a people near to Him those who remain in covenant with God, as opposed to those who are cut off through disobedience



Praise from the Earth 148:7-14

- *Praise the Lord*, All creatures, especially His saints, His people are to give glory and praise the Lord
- Let us accept St Augustine's invitation to praise Him, exalt Him and celebrate Him in His works: "When you observe these creatures and enjoy them and rise up to the Architect of all things and of created things, when you contemplate His invisible attributes intellectually, then a confession rises on earth and in heaven...If creation is beautiful, how much more beautiful must its Creator be?"



Discussion

- Who or what is called to praise the Lord?
- How can angels praise God?
- How can creation praise God?
- How can storms praise God?
- How can human beings praise God? Does that involve more than our words?



Discussion

- Why, according to the psalmist, should we praise the name of the Lord?
- How does the Psalm demonstrate the unity of creation in the act of worship?
- How does this Psalm present age-integrated, cross-generational worship?
- What does God do for His people in the last verse?