



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 149

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Introduction

- Psalm 149 is the fourth of five Hallel Psalms (Psalms 146-150)
- Each of these five Psalms begin and end with Alleluia or Praise the Lord
- There was no title for this Psalm nor the name of its author in any version
- It seems to be a Psalm sung after a particular great victory
- Some think that it seems to have been written by David in the beginning of his reign, when he obtained victories over his enemies, and had taken the strong-hold of Zion, and settled his government there

Introduction



- Some think that it goes back to the time of the Maccabees
- While others assume it to be written after the return from the captivity in Babylon, and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem
- It has been also understood as prophecy of the success of the Gospel in the nations of the earth
- According to the Syrian translation version, it concerns the new temple, by which the Christian Church is meant
- This Psalm of celebration is like an energizing call, urging all of God's people to praise the Lord regardless of their circumstances



Introduction

- That includes times when people are not naturally motivated to praise God
- The Psalm calls all to praise Israel's Divine King for granting His people salvation and the high honor of executing His judgment on the nations for their disobedience of His rule
- St. Augustine invite every Christian to praise the Lord both in voice, and in understanding, and in good works; and, as this Psalm exhorts, sing unto Him a new song



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies 149:1-3
- The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5
- Their Victories 149:6-9

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- Psalms 146-150 begin and end with *Praise the Lord*
- In many (or most) of the previous Psalms there was a trouble, crisis, or evil described and brought before the Lord
- In these five Psalms, it is all praise
- A festive atmosphere embraces the entire Psalm
- It begins with the initial *Alleluia* and then continues with chant, praise, joy, the sound of drums and of harps
- The Psalm inspires a prayer of thanksgiving from a heart filled with spiritual exultation
- The Psalm begins with a call to praise God with *a new song*

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- *a new song*, As if there was a new and a special occasion for praise, (Psalms 33:3 and 96:1)
- God's mercies are new every morning, *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning;"* (Lamentations 3:22-23)
- So, His people gratitude and thanksgivings ought to be new also
- This first verse seems to be directed to those the psalmist addressed in the last verse of the preceding Psalm, when he said, *"The praise of all His saints... A people near to Him"*
- For these three last Psalms of praise are so connected, and one appears to be such a continuation of the other

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- *a new song*, for a new mercy received, a new victory obtained, or a new salvation
- Above all the new song of redeeming grace through Jesus Christ
- The song of the Lamb, in distinction from the old song of Moses and the children of Israel at the Red sea, on account of their deliverance, which was typical of salvation by Jesus Christ
- St. Augustine says, “The old man has an old song, the new man a new song. The Old Testament is an old song, the New Testament a new song. In the Old Testament are temporal and earthly promises. Whoever loves earthly things sings an old song: let him that desires to sing a new song, love the things of eternity.”

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- *in the assembly of saints*, the Lord is the object of the praise of all His saints, to whom He has showed favor and kindness, and on whom He has bestowed the blessings
- St. John Chrysostom comments on *in the assembly of saints* and says, “He teaches us something else here: he shows that we must offer praise together and in complete harmony, *assembly* being a word meaning conformity and gathering.”
- *Let Israel rejoice, The new song* is intended to stir great joy; for it announces the favor of perfect happiness, and springs from most fervent love

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- Israel are the chosen people of God, therefore, they ought to sing this new song, rejoice in singing in Him who made them
- *in their Maker*, who not only called them into existence, but endowed them with grace, thus giving them not only existence, but to be *Israel*
- It is always *right* and *honorable* for the believers to praise and *rejoice* in their Creator
- *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King*, because God, by covenant with Israel, had constituted Himself in an especial way *their King*, (Judges 8:23; 1 Samuel 8:7, 10:19, 12:12; Hosea 13:10)

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- God is the *Maker* of all humanity, but is recognized as *King* only over His people
- This recognition is a source of incomparable joy to His people, the spiritual Israel, who realize they could never hope for a ruler greater in love, wisdom, and power
- St. John Chrysostom says, “He makes the general statement before mentioning individual favors...give thanks to God because He brought you into being when you did not exist...but he shows here something more important: he not simply mention creation but highlights relationship... give thanks not because God made them but because He also made them His own people.”

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- *Let them praise His name with the dance*, perhaps there is a reference here to the triumph of the Red Sea, where Miriam led the daughters of Israel in the dance when the Lord had triumphed gloriously, (Exodus 15:20)
- *the saints* joining together in their expressions of joy, by words and gestures; an ancient practice that went along with singing praises
- However, this was a dance of holy joy and not of lustful one
- Almost all commentators think that the word dance here did not mean dance the way it is known now

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- The gospel standard and law for singing the Psalms is to *sing with the spirit* and *with the understanding*
- *with the dance*, some translate it with a choir
- Singing in a choir requires that the singers sing in unison, with one spirit and one goal, in harmony and true love; and in such sense, it has been understood by the church fathers
- Some scholars believe that the word “dance” does not refer to body movements
- And it came in the Septuagint version as *with a flute or pipe*

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- *The pipe* is a musical instrument used in old times in the worship of God, praising His name, with *the timbrel and harp*
- The use of the same word in what was evidently a list of all the orchestral instruments used in the Temple in Psalm 150, would alone be almost decisive of the meaning
- Although, according to some others, actual body movements were used by certain peoples during worship, as a means to express man's joy, with his whole being, and not just with his tongue and mouth

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- Not content with singing this new son with joy and gladness, they will blend instrumental with vocal music, so that their hands, as well as their tongues, or in other words, their actions, as well as their words, shall be directed to God's praise and glory
- St. Ambrose states that the introduction of choirs into the Christian Church was not so much for musical effect as for the purpose of symbolizing unity of mind
- He says, "Psalmody unites those who were at variance, allies opponents, reconciles the offended. Who could help forgiving a man along with whom he had been uttering the same voice to God? It is surely a great bond of unity that all the multitude of the people should unite in one choir."

All are Invited to Praise God for His Mercies, 149:1-3



- According to St. John Chrysostom these musical instruments should be taken spiritually; the timbrel (or the drums), implies the mortification of the flesh; while the harp has reference to heaven
- He also says, “in ancient times they were led by these instruments owing to the dullness of their thinking and their recent conversion from idols. So, just as He permitted them sacrifices, in like manner He also let them have these things, out of graciousness for their limitations. Christians, on the other hand, are committed to bring to death the lusts of the body;...they should not use those tools when they praise God.”

The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5



- If God is so rich in grace and mercy that He takes *pleasure in His people* – despite all their sin and weakness – it is cause for great rejoicing
- He loves them and bestows His favors upon them
- All this should add to their joy, and fill their hearts with gladness
- That *pleasure* that *the Lord takes in His people* is that He has humbled Himself and become like one of them
- Most of the great ones among men despise the *humble* and leave them in their low condition
- But God resists the proud and gives grace to the *humble* (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5)

The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5



- He makes *the humble* beautiful with *salvation*
- The word *beautify* means to adorn, to honor; and it means that the salvation which God would bestow upon them would be like an ornament, as if they were clothed with costly or splendid clothing
- Not only is the victory which achieves the deliverance of the afflicted people a relief to them, but the honor won in the sight of the world is like a beautiful robe, a figure no doubt suggested by the actual triumphal dresses of the victors, or the spoils in which they appeared after the battle

The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5



- *Let the saints be joyful in glory, In the glory put upon them now, being beautified with salvation*
- In the glory of their condition; in the favor of God; in the honor which He bestows upon them
- Let them rejoice in this; let them shout and triumph over this
- Other men rejoice in honor or in wealth; *let the saints* rejoice in the *glory* of being the friends of God; in the hope of heaven
- A new motive that brings to them gladness, is that their glory is not anymore something outside them, like riches, authority, temporal honors, or physical health; but it is something within them

The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5



- Hence their hearts perpetually sing in all circumstances, and at all times, even while being on their beds
- *on their beds* signifies the safe and secure state of the saints upon their beds, lying down and sleeping comfortably, having nothing to fear, the Lord sustaining them
- Let them meditate on the word of God; converse with their own hearts about their state and condition; remember the Lord, and His goodness to them; all which give an occasion to give thanks unto Him, and sing aloud His praise
- Some take it as the psalmist describes the future glory of the believers, the eternal rest, for which they are with all their hearts to sing this new song

The People of God Great Privileges 149:4-5



- The saints shall rejoice in glory, to which none but the truly righteous arrive, and at the same time shall be joyful in *their beds*, in that place of ultimate rest, “*Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.*” (Revelation 14:13)
- Thus, *the saints in glory* shall rest from their labors, but not from their praise; they will ‘be on their beds,’ to rest there, but not to sleep
- St. Augustine says, “*Let them sing aloud on their beds;* not in theatres, or circuses, or follies, or market-places, but ‘in their chambers.’ What is, ‘in their chambers’? In their hearts.”



Their Victories 149:6-9

- God's people are pictured as ready for battle, equipped with two mighty weapons
- They bear *the high praises of God*; their worship indicates the faithfulness and surrender to the God of every victory
- A great victory was won for the people of God as they entered the battle with praise, "*they went out before the army and were saying: 'Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever.' Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.*" (2 Chronicles 20:20-21)



Their Victories 149:6-9

- They bear *a two-edged sword in their hand*, demonstrating both the use of practical weapons and means, and in a spiritual sense, reliance upon God's word, which is described as a *two-edged sword* (Revelation 19:15) as even sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), and as the *sword* of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17)
- Their praise is not merely to be that of the chanting of words; it is also to be in the doing of His will
- According to some commentators, this verse reveals the time in which this Psalm was written
- For the psalmist sees the people building the walls of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Nehemiah, while all of them shout heavenly praises with a loud voice; (Nehemiah 4:17-18)



Their Victories 149:6-9

- These very praises, according to St. John Chrysostom, are the two-edged sword, which in the hands of the Saints does far more to humiliate these enemies than any worldly skill
- St. Augustine does not quite accept this view, though coming near to it
- According to him the two-edged sword is the Word of God
- *a two-edged sword*, because it speaks of things temporal, it speaks also of things eternal
- This sword divides men from their nearest and dearest people when their ties become contrary with duty towards God, "*I did not come to bring peace but a sword.*" (Matthew 10:34)



Their Victories 149:6-9

- And this sword of the Word is said to be in their hands, not in their mouths, because of the strength and effect with which they use it
- And according to St. Jerome, (by *a two-edged sword* He strikes the enemies; and by it He opens up the kingdom of heaven.)
- The power of praise and the word of God will ultimately see God's work accomplished among *the nations*
- For those who persist in disobedience, it will be *vengeance* and *punishments* at the end of the age
- This was literally accomplished by David upon their enemies which were enemies to God's people



Their Victories 149:6-9

- St. Jerome says, “Why do the saints carry such swords? ‘To execute vengeance on the nations. To destroy every heresy, once and for all.’”
- And in a spiritual sense, Christians are to *execute vengeance* on everything that would oppose Jesus Christ and the work of His kingdom in their lives
- Not even *kings* or *nobles* can escape this judgment to come
- The whole idea is in accordance with what is so often expressed in the Psalms - that of inflicting just punishment on the wicked
- *To bind their kings with chains*, is to “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5)



Their Victories 149:6-9

- St. John Chrysostom says, “Do you see the flood of strength?...They not only drive away the enemies, and cast them aside, but they also take captives, and return bearing a testimony before all about the power of God.”
- *the written judgment*, The allusion is probably to Deuteronomy 32:41-42, where God announces the judgments that He will execute upon the oppressors of His people
- It is the sentence pronounced by God and recorded in His book (Isaiah 65:6,10:1; Job 13:26) for execution at the proper time



Their Victories 149:6-9

- The complete accomplishment of this will be in the judgment of the great day, when *“the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all.”* (Jude 14-15)
- Vengeance shall then be *executed upon the nations*, (Psalm 9:17)
- Or it may be related to the judgment upon antichrist in the last day, written in the word of God; and which will be executed by the saints, with the *two-edged sword* in their hands, *“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.”* (Revelation 16:6)
- It is an honor to engage in executing or carrying out the purposes of God



Their Victories 149:6-9

- *Honor* shall be for all God's beloved and the defeat of their enemies brings glory to God's people
- Alleluia is understood as either a declaration or an encouragement and exhortation
- Here, it can be taken as an encouragement for all those who reject and resist God to *praise* Him instead, to be among *His saints* and not among *the nations* who will receive God's vengeance
- It may also be about the saints offering praise and thanksgiving for they are allowed to be used in any way, however humble, in carrying out the Divine Plans



Discussion

- How does the idea of singing a "*new song*" to the Lord apply to your current life?
- What does the description of God's delight in His people mean to you personally?
- How can you manifest the joy and hope found in verses 4-5 in your daily life?



Discussion

- The two-edged sword is often associated with the Word of God. How can you wield this "sword" effectively in your spiritual warfare?
- How do you reconcile the themes of praise, joy, and vengeance present in this Psalm?
- How do the saints bind kings with chains?