



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 150

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Introduction

- This beautiful Psalm closes the series of five Alleluia Psalms (Psalms 146-150)
- Each of these five Psalms begin and end with Alleluia or Praise the Lord
- In all of them, there is no groaning or lamenting, nor any hint of going through sufferings or troubles; but one only hears unceasing joyful songs of praise and thanksgiving on the salvation of God
- Psalm 150 contains no argument, no real teaching, no real explanation



Introduction

- It is an eloquent, passionate cry to all creation to give God the praise due to Him
- This Psalm has neither a title nor the name of its author, whether in the Hebrew version or the others
- According to the Hebrew text, this Psalm is the last one of the whole book of Psalms
- But in the Septuagint Version, there is another one, Psalm 151
- This Psalm very probably was written by the same person, and about the same time of Psalms 148 and 149



Introduction

- This final Psalm, in the Hebrew text, is a call to praise the Lord, where the word “praise”, came 13 times to show the passionate desire of the psalmist that the Lord must be praised
- It is a very proper Psalm to conclude this book with, being all praise
- Some say this Psalm was sung by the Israelites, when they came with their first-fruits into the sanctuary, with the basket on their shoulders
- Psalm 150 provides guidance on praising the Lord in few words
- In only six verses, one can learn “Where to praise God”; “Why to praise God”; “How to praise God”; and “Who should praise God?”



Introduction

- The Psalm does not say we are to praise God according to God's actions
- Instead, we are to praise God according to God's *being*
- The Holy Book of Psalms begins with a promise, "Blessed is ..." (1:1), and ends with a praise, "Praise the Lord" (150:6)
- In between the first and last Psalms, we learn about the life that encounters God
- What does one say at the end of a life that has known God and walked with Him? Praise the Lord!



Introduction

- It explains how we are to understand the Lord's surpassing greatness
- This Psalm speaks of the ultimate end of a life that has encountered God
- Not the Levites only, whose business was in the temple service to praise the Lord with musical instruments, are here exhorted to it, but all people
- Not the people of Israel only; but the Gentiles also, even all that have breath
- For many, if not most Christians, the Holy Book of Psalms is the richest and the most comforting book of the Old Testament



Introduction

- Therefore, it is appropriate that it would conclude on Praise the Lord note, with a Psalm (150) totally and completely dedicated to the praise of our good, great and gracious God
- The Coptic Church sings Psalm 150 during the distribution of the Holy Eucharist and is the last part of the fourth 'Hos' (praise) in the daily vespers and the midnight prayers
- St. Clement of Alexandria, interpreted this Psalm in a beautiful symbolic way, in which he presented the church, risen from the dead, together with her Groom, as a living musical instrument, on which the Holy Spirit plays, to produce a sweet melody of love



Introduction

- In the fourth chapter of his second book “The Instructor”, St. Clement of Alexandria said that the church, in his time, did not use the musical instruments; For those instruments were used by the nations and the peoples to stir up hatred in wars...Whereas the unique tool of peace, is the “Word”, by which we honor God; and that is what we use; and not the ancient traditional instruments like the trumpet, the flute, the drums, etc. used by the heathens in their wars and celebrations.



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2
- How to Praise 150:3-5
- Who Ought to Praise 150:6

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- *Praise the Lord*, This last of the five Alleluia Psalms shares the same beginning and ending verse as the previous four Psalms
- The Lord is praised, and His people are encouraged, exhorted to praise Him
- No crisis or enemy is in view; this is pure praise
- We are commanded to praise the Lord thirteen times in these six verses
- Praising God is not an option; it is an obligation and is both our delight and our duty
- Following quickly on this verbal command are instructions specifying where God should be praised

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- First, *His sanctuary*, His holy place; the place where He dwells
- The allusion here is, probably, to the temple, the place of His presence on earth
- Or in heaven, the *sanctuary* of God which is a most fitting place for His *praise*
- It is a place set apart for His honor and involves special recognition of His presence
- If He is to be praised anywhere, it should be in *His sanctuary*
- Second, He should be praise *in His mighty firmament*

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- Since the *firmament* stretches from horizon to horizon, it tells us that God should be praised in every place under the sky
- The voices of earth and heaven join in perfect harmony in praise of the Lord
- From below and from above God is to be praised
- By man and by angel, the Lord is to be praised
- Gathered today on earth in the place set aside for worship, or throughout the expanse of the universe, our great God is to be praised

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- St. John Chrysostom says, “Now, observe how in turn he brought the book to a close with thanksgiving, teaching us how this ought be both beginning and end of our actions and words. Hence Paul also says, ‘whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Colossians 3:17).”
- The psalmist now in verse 2 teaches that God is to be praised, not because He simply resides in heaven, but because He resides there as the all powerful Ruler and Lord of all things
- *Praise Him for His mighty acts*, for His great strength and power

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- God's mighty acts are one reason to praise God in every place
- He has done great and powerful things
- His great acts of salvation; His mighty work of Creation, and His sovereign reign over all that He has made
- In the Old Testament one cannot help but think of the Exodus
- In the New Testament one cannot help but think of the cross and the Resurrection of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ
- *Praise Him according to His excellent greatness*, praise Him beyond measure, for such is His greatness, being simply and absolutely great

A General Exhortation to Praise God 150:1-2



- While it is right to praise God for the mighty things He does, there is perhaps something even greater in praising Him for *who He is*, in all the excellence of His *greatness*
- This greatness surpasses all else in the entire universe, *excellent* above all
- To praise God we must know God
- We must know, acknowledge and praise His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence
- His holiness, love, mercy, grace, righteousness, justice, faithfulness must continually be kept before our mind



How to Praise 150:3-5

- How should we praise the Lord?
- The simple answer is with everything that we are and with everything that we have
- The psalmist however has some particular things in mind that are instructive for God's people as they come together for worship
- He mentioned a variety of musical instruments; wind instruments such as *the trumpet*, and stringed such as *the lute and harp*
- Perhaps the idea here is simply to joyfully praise God with whatever we have to praise Him



How to Praise 150:3-5

- Trumpet, the ram's horn
- Lute, harp like but smaller, perhaps like the *guitar*
- Harp, stringed instrument larger than the lute
- All that could properly express praise - should be used to celebrate the praises of God
- Each instrument, with its own distinct note, and all combined in harmony, should be employed for this purpose
- There was good reason to mention *the trumpet* first in this long list
- The sound of trumpet is associated with great events



How to Praise 150:3-5

- It was used in calling the assembly together, for worship and on other occasions; and at the feast of blowing of trumpets, and in the year of jubilee, Numbers 10:1; and by the priests in temple service, 1 Chronicles 16:6
- And also, at the second coming of our Lord
- These musical instruments were symbolic of the spiritual melody made in the hearts of God's people, while they are praising Him in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, (Ephesians 5:19)
- *the timbrel*, a skin stretched over a broad hoop, perhaps something like the tambourine
- *and dance*, It never means *dance*



How to Praise 150:3-5

- And almost all commentators believe that the word “dance” does not refer to body movements
- As it was explained in Psalm 149, 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)
- *with the dance*, some translate it with a choir
- And it came in the Septuagint version as *with a flute or pipe*
- According to St. John Chrysostom these musical instruments should be taken spiritually



How to Praise 150:3-5

- *stringed instruments*, This literally signifies strings put in order and it might be applied to a harp, or a violin
- *flutes*, Very likely the syrinx or panpipe, which is a musical instrument based on the principle of the closed tube, consisting of multiple pipes of gradually increasing length
- It has its name from the beauty of their sound
- As it came in Genesis 4:21, “*His brother’s name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute.*”
- *with loud cymbals*, Two hollow plates of brass, which, being struck together, produced a sharp clanging sound



How to Praise 150:3-5

- St. Augustine explains that, “Cymbals touch one another in order to sound, and therefore are by some compared to our lips. But I think it better to understand that God is in a manner praised on the cymbal, when each is honored by his neighbor, not by himself, and then honoring one another, they give praise to God.”
- And St. Jerome says, “When we lift up holy hands in prayer, without wrath or doubting (1 Timothy 2:8), we play, according to the psalmist, on an instrument with ten strings for the Lord; and we play on the harp of our bodies and souls, in perfect harmony.”
- We are not to be concerned to enquire what sort of instruments these were, that is not the focus; it is enough that they were well known then



How to Praise 150:3-5

- What is important is to know how full the psalmist's heart was of the praises of God
- The best music in God's ears is holy and upright affections, not *stringed instruments and flutes* but a kind pleasant heart
- All these several instruments of music are named, not as to be used now in churches
- According to St. John Chrysostom, God commanded His people in the old covenant, to use the musical instruments, because of their spiritual weakness, to stir up in them the holy zeal to praise Him...Whereas now, as man reached the spiritual maturity, he uses all his body members as musical instruments, to express what is in his heart of love and thanksgiving to God



How to Praise 150:3-5

- What is important to Christians is to praise God with a strong faith; praise Him with faithfulness, with obedience to His commandments
- Praise Him by rejoicing in His love and in His great goodness
- These various instruments being used in praising God, had to be done in perfect harmony; they must not hinder, but help one another
- The instruments of the New Testament, instead of this, is *“with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 15:6)



Who Ought to Praise 150:6

- This is a remarkably fitting conclusion to this Psalm and to the entire Holy Book of Psalms
- Everything that breathes should give its praise to the One who gave it *breath*
- Every breath is the gift of God and praise is the worthy response we should make for that gift
- The psalmist's words find their echo in Revelation 5:13, "*And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'*"



Who Ought to Praise 150:6

- The psalmist began with a call to those that had a place in God's sanctuary and were used in the temple-service; but he concludes with a call to all the children of men
- St. John Chrysostom says, "I wish we praise God unceasingly, and not fail to present to Him, thanksgiving for everything, by words and by work; For that would be our best sacrifice and offering; and would be the most exalted worship, like the life of angels...If we persist on praising God in this way, we would enjoy a blameless life, and the good things to come."



Who Ought to Praise 150:6

- Thus, at the end of all the trials, the conflicts, the persecutions, the sorrows, the joys recorded in this book, the psalmist gives utterance to feelings of joy, triumph, rejoicing
- And thus, at the end of all, heaven, the whole universe, shall break forth in one loud, long, triumphant Alleluia
- One's life may resemble the Holy Book of Psalms with its varying feelings, its sorrow and smile; but it will end with Alleluia, if only he will keep true to the will and way and work of the Holy Spirit



Discussion

- How does Psalm 150 encourage you to think about the nature of praise and worship?
- What are the two things about God for which we praise Him (in verse 2)?
- Why do you think the psalmist emphasizes the use of different musical instruments in praising God?
- How does Psalm 150 challenge your understanding and practice of worship?



Discussion

- How can you create your own "symphony of praise" to God in your personal life?
- How does the psalmist's understanding of God's majesty challenge your own view of God?
- What barriers might prevent us from praising God as commanded in this Psalm, and how can we overcome them?
- How many times do we “praise the Lord” in this Psalm?