



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 151

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Introduction

- Psalm 151 is a short Psalm found in most manuscripts of the Septuagint (LXX), but not found in the Hebrew Scriptures
- The title given in the Septuagint is *'This is a Psalm written with David's own hand, although outside the number, when he fought in single combat with Goliath'*
- Although no number is attached to the Psalm in the Greek manuscript, it is commonly called Psalm 151 and is attributed to David
- The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church, and the Syrian Orthodox Church accept Psalm 151 as canonical



Introduction

- Catholics, Protestants, and most Jews do not accept it as part of the Holy Book of Psalms
- It is autobiographical dealing with David's own life and tells of David's stature, family position, work, his flute-playing and harp-making; his anointing by Samuel, who bypassed his brothers and was selected by God to be king, and his victory over Goliath
- Until the twentieth century, scholars believed that Psalm 151 was originally composed in Greek, based on the view that there is no evidence that Psalm 151 existed in Hebrew



Introduction

- But then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, and Psalm 151 was found in one of the scrolls
- These scrolls date back to the 1st century AD and was discovered in 1956
- An edited version of this manuscript was first published in 1963 by James A. Saunders
- The Hebrew version of Psalm 151 (in the Qumran scrolls) differs somewhat from the Septuagint translation
- In the Hebrew version, the Psalm is split into two separate texts, which are then combined and condensed into a shorter text in the Septuagint translation



Introduction

- It is also included in some manuscripts of Peshitta
- The Peshitta is a collection of Aramaic manuscripts of the Holy Bible
- Aramaic was the most common language among people of the Middle East for many centuries
- This includes the years immediately before and after the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ
- For this reason, the Peshitta was an important early translation of the Holy Bible, widely distributed and widely used
- The earliest available manuscripts date to the AD 400s
- This Psalm draws many expressions from Scripture



Introduction

- Pope Athanasius of Alexandria said that this Psalm was "especially a Psalm of David" and suited the occasion "to be elected to some position of authority among the brethren, though weak
- St. Athanasius in his letter to Marcellinus says, "You want to sing to Him? Use 96 and 98. If, weak as you are, you yet are chosen for some position of authority among the brethren, you must not be puffed up as though you were superior to them, but rather glorify the Lord Who chose you and sing Psalm 151, which is especially the Psalm of David."



Introduction

- In the Armenian Church liturgy, Psalm 151 is recited as part of the Matins sequence of biblical verses, which includes hymns from the Old and New Testaments, Psalms 51, 148–150, and 113 (numbering according to the Septuagint)
- The Armenian version of Psalm 151 is close to the Septuagint, with some variation
- Coptic churches read Psalm 151 at the beginning of the Bright Saturday Vigil, also known as the Apocalypse Vigil
- The words of the Psalm are interpreted as a Messianic prophecy regarding the defeat of Satan by Jesus Christ



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- David's Insignificance 151:1-2
- God's Choice of David 151:3-5
- David's Slaughter of Goliath 151:6-7



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- This Psalm describes certain aspects of David's life
- He describes himself as a musician and a shepherd, chosen by God despite the fact that his brothers were handsome and tall
- He also talks about his victory over Goliath
- David was small and the youngest of his brothers but was anointed to shepherd the people of God
- David often says that he will always remember God's past works with him
- He will never forget that, because he was the youngest of his brothers, he was entrusted with shepherding his father's sheep



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- But God was preparing him for a greater shepherding task, that of guiding the flock of God
- Remembering his humble youth, kept him walking with the spirit of humility, perceiving that he had no merit for what he reached of high position or great success
- It gave him, as well a kind of confidence and trust in God, who has chosen him from among his handsome brothers, to be a prophet and a king over the people of God
- His humility and trust in the work of God, were his support in his life, the source of joy, and songs of praise, even in the worst moments of affliction



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- Samuel wanted to anoint Jesse's eldest son, but God told him, *"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7)
- St. Clement of Alexandria says, "he anointed not him that was handsome in person, but him that was handsome in soul."
- God chose him for his inner purity and the beauty of his soul, and not for his outer appearance
- God previously gave His people Saul the son of Kish as a king



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- He was tall and handsome as they wished
- But now, He chose for them a king according to His will
- God often chooses unlikely people to do His work, so that everyone knows the work is God's work, not man's work
- He wants to work in a way so that people wonder at the secret of their strength (Judges 16:5)
- David had low regard among his own family
- His father did not even mention him by name to Samuel; he was not even invited to the sacrificial feast; and he was only called to come because Samuel insisted on it



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- According to St. Augustine, choosing David, the smallest among his brothers, is a symbolic reference to choosing the Gentiles as members in the church of the new covenant, instead of the Jews, who, although preceded them in knowledge, yet they rejected faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- It is as though the Gentiles symbolize David, the smallest among his brothers, who received the grace of royalty from God; according to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, saying: *"So the last will be the first, and the first last"* (Matthew 20:16)
- In the same way, Abel was preferred over Cain, his older brother; and Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau, his twin brother; and Perez over Zerah (Genesis 38:29)



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- *Lyre*, is an ancient stringed instrument with at least seven or eight strings
- It was played to accompany singers and is mentioned many times in the Old Testament
- Because of his job, tending the sheep, David learnt playing on the harp, and thus God used this talent to introduce him to King Saul
- By tending God's creation, he learnt to praise God with spiritual Psalms, and to use the sling which helped him later to defeat Goliath



David's Insignificance 151:1-2

- What is this *a musical instrument*, or *a lyre* or *a harp* that drives away the distressing spirit, and gives comfort to man (1 Samuel 16: 23), but the Word of God
- According to the scholar Origen: (The Holy Scripture is God's one instrument, which, in its integrity and harmony, gives, through the diverse sounds, the one sound of salvation, to those who wish to learn. It is the harp that brings to nothing, and opposes, the work of every wicked spirit; as it happened with David, the musician, who, by his music, managed to calm down the distressing spirit of Saul.)



God's Choice of David 151:3-5

- *And who shall tell my Lord?* When the women sang to David after he killed Goliath, jealousy rose in the heart of king Saul, and he tried to kill him
- He even fled from him, and Saul pursued him; until Saul died in the war
- Perhaps, David wonders in this verse and says, "Who would tell my lord king Saul that I love him and submit to him?"
- Especially since David's love appeared during Saul's pursuit of him, as Saul fell twice under the hand of David, and he did not harm him



God's Choice of David 151:3-5

- Or perhaps, by “My Lord, the Lord Himself” means who tells the Lord, “I love Saul,” and David responds to himself and says, “The Lord Himself is the only one who can tell Saul and make him know that I love him.”
- *He Himself hears*, Because the Lord responds to those who cry out to Him, and David was praying and crying out to God about this matter
- This verse shows the extent of David's suffering from Saul's persecution of him, and it also shows David's faith in God and his love for prayer



God's Choice of David 151:3-5

- *He sent forth His Angel*, It is the prophet Samuel because the word angel means sent, so God sent Samuel
- He anointed him like a king while he was in his father's house
- *and took me from my father's sheep*, David glorifies God who, *"raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, That He may seat him with princes— with the princes of His people."* (Psalm 113:7-8)
- The Mosaic law commanded the anointment of persons (kings and priests), places (the temple), and vessels dedicated for the service of the house of the Lord, etc.,
- The purpose is that the anointed become dedicated to God alone



God's Choice of David 151:3-5

- David was the youngest among his brothers, resembling our Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly king, who made Himself of no reputation, emptying Himself for us (Philippians 2:7)
- He took the lowest place, that He may gather all into Himself and elevate them by His Holy Spirit to the bosom of the Heavenly Father
- St. Augustine views choosing David over his oldest brother, as a symbolic act resembling the acceptance of the gentiles as members of the church of the New Testament and choosing them over the Jews, who preceded them in the faith but then refused to believe



God's Choice of David 151:3-5

- When the prophet Samuel intended to anoint 'Eliab' the oldest son of Jesse, thinking that he looks like a king and he must be the one God wants to anoint, the Lord said to him: *"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7)
- According to St Clement of Alexandria, "He did not anoint the one good looking in stature, but the one with a beautiful soul."



David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7

- The Palestinian Goliath stood up to defy the armies of God's people for forty days, challenging them saying, *"Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."* (1 Samuel 17:8-9)
- Saul and all Israel *were dismayed and greatly afraid* upon hearing that
- But David, who was young, but his trust was on God, approached with courage with his staff in his hand, the symbol of the cross

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- *“The Philistine cursed David by his gods”, (1 Samuel 17:43)*
- But David did not fear but said, *“I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”* (1 Samuel 17:45)
- David was a powerful warrior, for while he was tending the sheep, he wrestled wild beasts without a weapon like a skillful warrior, though he was never one, but his personality and talents enabled him to be so
- He was eloquent in speech, sweet in his Psalms, handsome in appearance, but most of all he had “God with him”, and this is the secret of his strength

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- David was more concerned with God's cause than with his own feelings
- When David was misunderstood and publicly rebuked by his own brother, probably amid the laughs of the other soldiers, he could have quit
- But he showed the strength of the armor of God in his life and replied rightly
- He didn't care about his glory or success, but only for the glory and success of the Lord's *cause*
- David was careful to say, *the Lord will deliver you into my hand*

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- David was bold, but bold in God not in himself because he knew the battle belonged to the Lord
- David was a symbol of Christ who defeated Satan by the cross
- In a symbolic interpretation of the story of David and Goliath, St. Augustine, said: "When Jesse sent his son David to see how his brothers fare; It so seems that he was a symbol of God the Father, who sent His Only Begotten Son, about whom it is said: 'I will declare Your name to my brethren'" (Psalm 22:23)."
- Christ has truly come to see how His brethren fare; saying: *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24)

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- As the staff symbolized the cross; the stone with which David struck Goliath in his forehead, symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ; the Living Stone, about whom it is said: "*The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone*" (Psalm 117:22)
- David stood over Goliath and killed him, not with a sword of his own, but with that of Goliath himself
- By his humility, David killed the prideful Goliath by his own sword, similar to the Son of David, who destroyed Satan and his kingdom through the Cross, which Satan thought he can use to get rid of Jesus Christ and kill humanity by pride

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- According to St. Ambrose, the secret behind David's victory is that he did not begin the war, but Goliath did; his spiritual zeal encouraged him to fight Goliath; and went into the battlefield only after he asked for the Lord's guidance
- St. Ambrose says, "David never waged war unless he was driven to it. Thus, prudence was combined in him with fortitude in the battle. For even when about to fight single-handed against Goliath, the enormous giant, he rejected the armor with which he was laden. His strength depended more on his own arm than on the weapons of others. Then, at a distance, to get a stronger throw, with one cast of a stone, he slew his enemy. After that he never entered on a war without seeking counsel of the Lord."

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- St. Ambrose also thinks that David conquered because he offered himself in the place of the people
- His aim was the benefit of others and not his own self interests
- Jacob of Serugh says: “This salvation granted to the people by David, resembles the salvation granted to all nations. The arrogant, uncircumcised Goliath who was defying the camp resembles Satan, who was defying all the human race. In appearance he was armed with a shield, and in reality, with pride. He carried his armor, but it was none as great as his blasphemy.”

David's Slaughter of Goliath

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- He continue and says, “Though king, the lad was hidden among the tribes, even as Christ was hidden in the world though He was God. The people did not know that David was anointed to rule, that the image of the Son may be evident in his hiddenness. He was in the world and the world did not know Him. He came to His own even as David came to his kingdom. David gained nothing new in his kingship, he was already king without struggle. Similarly, Christ did not triumph because He was tried; for He was God and endured strife only for humanity...David married the king's daughter, for he had saved her father's house from slavery. With this salvation is the mystery of the church complete. Blessed is He who came and revealed the wondrous mysteries.”

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- By this Psalm the Holy Book of Psalms ends
- St. John Chrysostom comments on the value of the Psalms and says, “If we keep vigil in church, David comes first, last and central. If early in the morning we want songs and hymns, first, last and central is David again. If we are occupied with the funeral solemnities of those who have fallen asleep, or if virgins sit at home and spin, David is first, last and central. O amazing wonder! Many who have made little progress in literature know the Psalter by heart. Nor is it only in cities and churches that David is famous; in the village market, in the desert, and in uninhabitable land, he excites the praise of God.”

David's Slaughter of Goliath

151:6-7



- And he continues and says, “In monasteries, among those holy choirs of angelic armies, David is first, last and central. In the convents of virgins, where are the communities of those who imitate Mary; in the deserts where there are men crucified to the world, who live their life in heaven with God, David is first, last and central. All other men at night are overcome by sleep. David alone is active, and gathering the servants of God into seraphic bands, he turns earth into heaven, and converts men into angels.”



Discussion

- Why is Psalm 151 not in the Holy Bible?
- What can we learn about David and his character from his encounter with Goliath?
- Why do you think God chose a shepherd boy to defeat a seasoned warrior?
- What role does humility play in this story, and how can we apply this lesson to our lives?



Discussion

- How does God use unlikely individuals for His purpose according to this story?
- How does David's victory over Goliath illustrate the biblical principle of spiritual warfare?
- How does the story of David and Goliath ultimately point to Jesus and the resurrection?