

Exposition on Psalm 114

by St. Augustine

Psalm 114 is a prophetic psalm that uses past events to reveal future events, encouraging believers to recognize themselves in the story of Israel and to withdraw spiritually from the world.

Scripture: Joshua 3:15, Psalm 113:1, Jeremiah 2:27, Mark 1:10, John 4:14, John 10:16, Romans 2:28, 1 Corinthians 10:11, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Philippians 3:13, 1 John 2:18

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Faith And Grace"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the significance of the events in the Bible, such as the crossing of the River Jordan, as both historical accounts and prophetic symbols for future generations. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing ourselves in the stories, understanding that as Christians, we are spiritually connected to Israel and the house of Jacob through faith and grace. Augustine urges believers to renounce the ways of the world, symbolized by Egypt, and to turn towards God, allowing Him to lead us into His promises with divine help and mercy.

Transcript

1. The river Jordan, when they were entering across it into the land of promise, when touched by the feet of the priests who bore the Ark, stood still from above with bridled stream, while it flowed down from below, where it ran on into the sea, until the whole people passed over, the priests standing on the dry ground. Joshua 3:15-17 We know these things, but yet we should not imagine in this Psalm, to which we have now answered by chanting Allelujah, that it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit, that while we call to mind those deeds of the past, we should not consider things like them yet to take place. For these things, as the Apostle says, happened unto them for ensamples. 1 Corinthians 10:11

2. When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from among the strange people Psalm 113:1, Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion Psalm 113:2; the sea saw that and fled, Jordan was driven back Psalm 113:3. Think not that past deeds are related unto us, but rather that the future is predicted; since, while those miracles also were going on in that people, things present indeed were happening, but not without an intimation of things future....Some things he has related differently to what we have learned and read there: that he might not truly be thought to be repeating past acts rather than to be prophesying future things. For in the first place, we read not that the Jordan was driven back, but that it stood still on the side nearest the source of its streams, while the people were passing through; next, we read not of the mountains and hills skipping: all which he has added, and repeated. For after saying, The

sea saw that, and fled; Jordan was driven back: he added, The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like young sheep Psalm 113:4: and then asks, What ails you, O thou sea, that you fled, and thou, Jordan, that you were driven back? Psalm 113:5. You mountains, that you skipped like rams; and you little hills, like young sheep? Psalm 113:6.

3. Let us therefore consider what we are taught here; since both those deeds were typical of us, and these words exhort us to recognise ourselves. For if we hold with a firm heart the grace of God which has been given us, we are Israel, the seed of Abraham: unto us the Apostle says, Therefore are you the seed of Abraham... Let therefore no Christian consider himself alien to the name of Israel. For we are joined in the corner stone with those among the Jews who believed, among whom we find the Apostles chief. Hence our Lord in another passage says, And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, that there may be one fold and one Shepherd. John 10:16 The Christian people then is rather Israel, and the same is preferably the house of Jacob; for Israel and Jacob are the same. But that multitude of Jews, which was deservedly reprobated for its perfidy, for the pleasures of the flesh sold their birthright, so that they belonged not to Jacob, but rather to Esau. For you know that it was said with this hidden meaning, That the elder shall serve the younger.

4. But Egypt, since it is said to mean affliction, or one who afflicts, or one who oppresses, is often used for an emblem of this world; from which we must spiritually withdraw, that we may not be bearing the yoke with unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 For thus each one becomes a fit citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, when he has first renounced this world; just as that people could not be led into the land of promise, save first they had departed from Egypt. But as they did not depart thence, until freed by Divine help; so no man is turned away in heart from this world, unless aided by the gift of the Divine mercy. For what was there once prefigured, the same is fulfilled in every faithful one in the daily travailings of the Church, in this end of the world, in this, as the blessed John writes, last time. 1 John 2:18 Hear the Apostle the teacher of the Gentiles, thus instructing us: I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples. 1 Corinthians 10:1-6 What more do ye wish, most beloved brethren? For it is surely clear, not from human conjecture, but from the declaration of an Apostle, that is, of God and our Lord: for God spoke in them, and though from clouds of flesh, yet it was God who thundered: surely then it is clear by so great testimony that all these things which were done in figure, are now fulfilled in our salvation; because then the future was predicted, now the past is read, and the present observed.

5. Hear what is even more wonderful, that the hidden and veiled mysteries of the ancient books are in some degree revealed by the ancient books. For Micah the prophet speaks thus. According to the days of your coming out of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things, etc... In this Psalm, therefore, although the wonderful spirit of prophecy does look into the future, yet it seems, as it were, to be merely detailing to the past. Judah, he says, was His sanctuary: the sea saw that and fled: was, saw, and fled, are words of the past tense; and Jordan was driven back, and the mountains skipped, and the earth trembled, in like manner have a past expression, without, however, any difficulty in understanding by them the future... For though it was so long after the departure of that people from Egypt, and so long before these seasons of the Church, that he sang what I have quoted; nevertheless, he witnesses that he is foretelling the future without any question. According to the days, he says, of your coming out of the land of Egypt will I show

unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded. This is what is here said, The sea saw that, and fled: for if in this passage, through words of the past tense the future is secretly revealed, as is the case; who would venture to explain the words, shall see and be confounded, of past events? And a little lower down he alludes more clearly than light itself to those very enemies of ours, who followed us flying, that they might slay us, that is, our sins, which are overwhelmed and extinguished in Baptism, just as the Egyptians were drowned in the sea, saying, since He retains not His anger for ever, because He is of good will and merciful, He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us, He will drown our iniquities: and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

6. What is it, most beloved? You who know yourselves to be Israelites according to Abraham's seed, you who are of the house of Jacob, heirs according to promise, know that even you have gone forth from Egypt, since you have renounced this world; that you have gone forth from a foreign people, since by the confession of piety, you have separated yourselves from the blasphemies of the Gentiles. For it is not your tongue, but a foreign one, which knows not how to praise God, to whom you sing Allelujah. For Judah has become His sanctuary in you; for he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and by circumcision of the heart. Romans 2:28-29 Examine then your hearts, if faith has circumcised them, if confession has cleansed them; in you Judah has become His sanctuary, in you Israel has become His dominion. For He gave unto you the power to become the sons of God. John 1:12 ...

7. But I would not that you should seek without yourselves, how the Jordan was turned back, I would not ye should augur anything evil. For the Lord chides those who have turned their back unto Him, and not their face. Jeremiah 2:27 And whoever forsakes the source of his being, and turns away from his Creator; as a river into the sea, he glides into the bitter wickedness of this world. It is therefore good for him that he turn back, and that God whom he had set behind his back, may be before his face as he returns; and that the sea of this world, which he had set before his face, when he was gliding on towards it, may become behind him; and that he may so forget what is behind him, that he may reach forward to what is before him; Philippians 3:13 which is profitable for him when once converted....

8. Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob Psalm 113:7. What means, at the presence of the Lord, save at the presence of Him who said, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:30 For the earth trembled; but because it had remained slothful, it was made to tremble, so that it might be more firmly fixed at the presence of the Lord.

9. Who turned the hard rock into standing waters, and the flint stone into springing wells Psalm 113:8. For He melted Himself, and what may be called His hardness to water those who believe in Him, that He might in them become a fountain of water gushing forth unto everlasting life; John 4:14 because formerly, when He was not known, He seemed hard. Hence they who said, This is an hard saying, who can bear it? John 6:60 were confounded, and waited not until He should flow and stream upon them when the Scriptures were revealed. The rock, that hardness, was turned into pools of water, that stone into fountains of waters, when on His resurrection, He expounded unto them, commencing with Moses and all the prophets, how Christ ought to suffer thus; Luke 24:26-27 and sent the Holy Ghost, of whom He said, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. John 7:37

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