



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 15

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is simply titled *A Psalm of David*
- In it, David meditates over the character of the man received into the presence of God
- We have no precise occasion for this psalm
- But, together with Psalm 24, it may well have been on the bringing of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6)
- This was a time when David was very much concerned with the questions asked and answered in this psalm
- Because he failed in transferring the ark the first time, for he did not assign this to the Levites according to the law



Introduction

- But on the second attempt he is more careful, not only to assign the work of carrying the ark to the divinely appointed Levites (1 Chronicles 15:2), but also to leave it in charge of the man whose house the Lord had blessed, even Obed-Edom, who, with his many sons, ministered in the house of the Lord (1 Chronicles 26:8,12)
- It seems normal indeed that this psalm follows the previous one, Psalm 14
- Psalm 14 reveals the traits of the wicked one; but this Psalm reveals the characteristics of the righteous man



Introduction

- In the Agpeya this psalm is Psalm 14 according to the Septuagint Translation
- This psalm contains the passage we read when entering the Lord's house to participate in the liturgical service
- It is like a repentance prayer and self-examination before sharing in the Eucharist liturgy



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Question: *LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?* 15:1
- The Answer: The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



The Question: LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? 15:1

- Who is worthy to be received as God's guest, to enjoy His protection and hospitality, to dwell in the place which He has consecrated by His Presence?
- What we have here is a picture of close fellowship of man with God
- *abide* refers to a temporary condition; *dwell* is a permanent position
- The two words suggest a progression from guest to full-time resident in the presence of God
- These questions speak not only of being at home with God on earth but also in heaven



The Question: LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? 15:1

- The tabernacle, which was a kind of moveable temple, carried about on the shoulders of the priests and Levites, there was no dwelling there for anyone; they could but lodge or sojourn
- It was therefore, a type of the Church militant, or the state of the people of God in this world; sojourners
- The followers of God, having here no continuing city; sojourning only on earth to get a preparation for eternal glory
- *holy hill*, Mount Zion, the holy mount, where the temple was built, was the type of the kingdom of heaven



The Question: LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? 15:1

- There the ark became immovable and was no longer carried about from place to place
- The Temple was a fixed and permanent building
- The Temple is a proper type of the Church triumphant in heaven
- The questions therefore are: who can be considered a fit member of the Church of Christ here on earth? And, who shall be made partakers of an endless glory?
- The term “tabernacle” (also “sanctuary”) is synonymous with a place where God is specially and intimately present



The Question: LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? 15:1

- His presence was so strong there that not just anyone could enter – only someone truly qualified, hence the question to open the Psalm is: who gets to really be in the intimate presence of God?
- St. Augustine's comment on the *holy hill* is that "Here perhaps he signifies at once the eternal habitation itself, that we should understand by "mountain" the supereminence of the love of Christ in life eternal."

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- In describing the character of the man who can live in God's presence, David begins with two positive general descriptions *He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness*
- The conduct of one's life is a reflection of his fellowship with God
- As John wrote: *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth* (1 John 1:6)
- It is he who is without deceit, or hypocrisy, loving and serving God, and loving his neighbor, not in word only, but in truth, and this constantly, and in the whole course of his life, as the word walking implies

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- He is a true man; in him there is no false way
- He is no man of deception; speaking one thing, and meaning another
- He professes nothing but what he feels and intends
- His mouth speaks nothing but what his heart dictates
- His heart, his tongue, and his hand, are all in unity and harmony
- Hypocrisy and deceit have no place in his soul
- In verse 3 he begins talking about the negative characteristics
- A *backbiter* is one who privately, secretly, behind a man's back speaks evil of him, devours and destroys his reputation

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- Or, speaks evil of anyone, nor makes the weakness of others the subject of his conversation, nor at all but for edification
- He not only avoids evil speaking, but he avoids also evil acting towards his neighbor
- He speaks no evil of him; he does no evil to him; he does him no harm
- St. Augustine says, “Deceit is practiced with the tongue, when one thing is professed with the mouth, another concealed in the breast.”

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- Now, the thought of how to deal with one's neighbor leads David to consider how the man who knows God evaluate other people
- David knew that we cannot love good unless we also oppose evil
- As it says in Proverbs 8:13, *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil*
- This righteous man *honors those who fear the LORD*; he makes his judgments about men on a godly basis, not from partiality
- He evaluates others by their conduct
- He knows men only by the fruits they bear; and thus he gains knowledge of the principle from which they proceed

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- The truthfulness of his character is shown in his evaluation of men
- The world's false assessment are one of the evils
- As the righteous man honors those who fear God, so he contemns and despises those who are wicked or insincere
- Men's outward circumstances are nothing to him
- He does not honor anyone because of his wealth, or honor, or greatness, or even his education
- He *honors* or *despises* according to men's moral qualities

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- The man who knows God puts these two groups on a scale
- The ones who are rejected by God he gives very little weight to
- While the people who fear the Lord just tip the scale and rise above
- *He who swears to his own hurt*, The idea behind this is the man keeps his promises even when it is no longer to his advantage to do so
- One who knows God will make promises and keep them
- And the last part of the blameless character that a man who knows the Lord possesses is the way he treats those who are disadvantaged

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- David described the man who wants to live a righteous life when it comes to *money*
- Taking interest was forbidden by the Law in dealing with a fellow-Israelites as an unbrotherly act (Leviticus 25:36-37; Exodus 22:25, Ezekiel 18:17)
- But was allowed in dealing with foreigners (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)
- Those who fear God cannot be guilty of *usury* or taking advantage of the necessity of a distressed neighbor or the poor
- In that time (as now), some creditors charged high interest rates that insured that a poor person could never get out of debt

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- Creditors could threaten debtors with prison or being sold into slavery (2 Kings 4:1; Matthew 18:25-30; Luke 12:57-59)
- Jewish laws against *usury* were intended to prevent that
- *Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent*, Either to swear falsely against him, or to pass a wrong sentence on him; 1 Samuel 12:3
- While Christians are not bound by Jewish laws, we are bound to Jesus' commandment to love (*agapao*) our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40)
- Jesus defined neighbor broadly in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- If we love our neighbor with *agape* love, we will not take extreme advantage of him/her
- We will instead be as kind and generous as circumstances permit
- *shall never be moved, From the tabernacle of God and His holy hill*
- As St. John expressed, “*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*” (1 John 2:17)
- He is fit to be a member of the church of God, and an inhabitant of His kingdom; and he shall dwell and abide there, he shall be a pillar which shall never go out, Revelation 3:12

The Characteristics of the One Who Can Come Before God 15:2-5



- You can be assured that if you are one who dwells with the Lord – who knows Him and abide with Him and in Him – if you through that knowledge and with God’s help practice these characteristics and actions – then you will not *be moved*
- You will be steadfast and abiding in the Lord’s tent and dwelling in His holy hill
- No one and nothing will move you
- You shall not only be *on the holy hill*, but *like Zion*, secured, immovable, stable, and firm



Discussion

- David stressed the value of integrity, honesty, and sincerity. How might Christians practice these virtues at home, in church, and in the business community?
- List the five positive and negative characteristics of a faithful follower.
- Does this Psalm imply a righteous person will never suffer?