



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 24

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Introduction

- This psalm is simply titled *A Psalm of David*
- And according to the Septuagint version it is “*A psalm of David himself, on the first day of the week.*” Namely, to be sung on the first day after the Sabbath which is Sunday
- Although it is clear from the title that David is the author, a group of scholars think that he is not
- They believe that this psalm was a song of triumph sung by those returning victorious from a battle; ascending to the temple of God, to glorify the ark of the covenant



Introduction

- And according to St. Augustine, *“A Psalm of David himself, touching the glorifying and resurrection of the Lord, which took place early in the morning on the first day of the week, which is now called the Lord’s Day.”*
- This Psalm was composed on occasion of bringing the ark from the house of Obed-edom to "the city of David," or to Jerusalem
- Others think that David wrote it to be sung on the occasion of the dedication of the temple, which he, by the spirit of prophecy knew that his son Solomon was going to build
- The eye of the psalmist looked, however, beyond the normal event of the bringing of the ark, to the glorious ascension of the King of glory



Introduction

- There is a connection between Psalms 22, 23, and 24
- Psalm 22 proclaims the Messiah, the suffering Savior
- Psalm 23 proclaims Him as the Good Shepherd
- Psalm 24 presents to us the glorified King
- According to tradition in our Orthodox church, this psalm is sung in the feasts of resurrection and ascension
- It is included in the Psalms of the Third Hour prayers of Agpeya
- It is called the Song of the Ascension



Introduction

The Psalm Outline:

- The Lord is the Creator Sovereign Ruler of All 24:1-2
- The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6
- The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

The Lord is the Creator Sovereign Ruler of All 24:1-2



- The psalmist begins with a representation of God's dominion over this world in general, and his providential presence in every part of it
- His sovereignty is not limited to a single nation or a single country
- St. Jerome says, *"A believer is not judged according to his place of residence, whether here or there, but according to the worthiness of his faith."*
- He is the Lord of all the world, for He is its Creator
- Men may claim districts and kingdoms as their property, but God is Lord of the *earth*

The Lord is the Creator Sovereign Ruler of All 24:1-2



- *The earth* is the symbol of the church where God dwells in the midst of His people
- The *earth* is also a symbol of our body
- It is the possession of God, who sanctifies our earth (our body) with all its senses, emotions, power, and desires as good things given by Him
- *“The Holy Book says: ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness’ By this it teaches us that all good things are from God, presented to mankind by His divine power and might, and distributed by Him to support man.”* St. Clement of Alexandria

The Lord is the Creator Sovereign Ruler of All 24:1-2



- *all its fullness*, All which it contains; everything which goes to “fill up” the world: animals, minerals, vegetables, people
- All belong to God, and He has a right to claim them for His service
- We know that even the waves obeyed Jesus' voice when He spoke to the waves and said, peace be still (Mark 4:39)
- The water, the land and the sky are all subject to God
- God has established the earth above the seas and water, causing it to "appear," and thus making it a fitting habitation for man
- David looks back to the creation account of Genesis 1 and remembers the creation of land in the midst of earth's waters

The Lord is the Creator Sovereign Ruler of All 24:1-2



- *established it upon the waters*, The founding of the earth upon the *waters* should remind us how slippery and uncertain all earthly things are
- Their foundation is not only sand, but *water*; it is therefore, foolishness to build upon them
- Some may think that the “world” belongs to Satan
- Satan is called *the god of this age* (2 Corinthians 4:4), and when he tempted Jesus with the promise of giving Him the kingdoms of this world, Jesus did not question the devil’s ability to do so
- But the truth is Satan can only do what God allows him to do

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- In light of God's sovereign ownership of the earth and all who live upon it, David wondered exactly who had the right to stand before God
- Many will say, *'Let us go up'*, but here David asks, Who of all that number *shall ascend?* seeing that, "*many are called, but few chosen.*"
- Though the Lord has a claim in general *to the whole world, and all its fulness;* yet there is a particular part of it which is His special property, and that is His church and people

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- For though there may be some references, in this passage, to Mount Moriah, and the hill of Zion, on which the temple was afterwards built, and is called the hill of the Lord, where He desired to dwell, Psalm 68:15; yet the church is mystically intended
- And having gone up, *Who may stand*
- The importance of these questions is, who is a proper person to be an inhabitant of Zion, or a member of Christ's church?
- God's supreme sovereignty requires a befitting holiness of life and heart in His worshippers

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- Some think *the hill* refers to the Church Militant; some the Church triumphant; some understand it of Christ Himself; according to prophecy of Daniel 2:35, when Nebuchadnezzar beheld the “*the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*”
- *He who has clean hands*, Whose actions, *hands*, and conversation are holy, righteous, and blameless
- The hands lifted up in prayer must be pure hands
- Not only *clean hands*, but he who has also *a pure heart*, good intentions, since the heart is the source of all evil (Matthew 15:19-20)

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- Sinful words and wicked acts are the natural results of an impure heart
- Though *clean hands* are mentioned first, as being more obvious to view and more subject to the observation of others; yet a *pure heart* is first in being and in order
- Without pure heart there is no clean hands
- However, no man has a pure heart naturally and of himself
- The heart is desperately wicked; the imagination of the thoughts of it is evil continually
- The mind and conscience are defiled with sin

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- Nor can any man make his heart clean, or say he is pure from sin
- But it is God that creates a clean heart, and renews a right spirit within men, and purifies the heart by faith
- The one accepted by God also rejects idolatry, in his actions and especially in his *soul*
- They do not set their cares upon the things of this world
- Those whose hearts are not carried out towards the wealth of this world, the praise of men, or the pleasure of senses, do not *lift up their souls unto vanity*

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- Those who do not choose these things, nor reach forth after them, because they believe them to be vanity, uncertain and unsatisfying, can stand before God
- *Nor sworn deceitfully*; The words we speak are a good indication of the state of our heart, the inner self (Matthew 12:34)
- One who makes deceptive promises has no place before God
- And in the fullest sense there was but One in Whom all these things were fulfilled; so that in reply to the question, *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?* He might well answer, *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man Who is in heaven”* (John 3:13)

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- Now, what are the fruits of this holy church life?
- The believers who walk in a holy life *shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation*
- God rewards those who honor Him with their lives
- To the person who comes to God with an honest and true heart, God will give additional graces, such as justification, assurance, perseverance, and unwavering hope
- He shall be regarded and treated as righteous
- The wicked and the impure could not hope to obtain this *blessing*

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- But he who was thus righteous would be treated according to his real character and would meet with the assurances of the divine favor
- It is as true now as it was in the days of the psalmist, that it is only the man who is in fact upright and holy that can obtain the evidences of the divine approval
- *This is Jacob*, Some of the Fathers explain it of our Lord, spoken of, under the title of Jacob; to show that it is by means of His Incarnation, His becoming like us and being called as we are, that only we attempt to approach Him

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- But according to others it means that we can seek the face that Jacob saw, that our life may also be preserved, *“I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”* (Genesis 32:30)
- Or, it may also mean that He Whom we seek is called the God of Jacob signifying that we also must struggle and wrestle, if we would reach Him
- *This is Jacob*, It is also a way of identifying God’s covenant people
- The repetition here is a lesson for us to learn the earnestness in prayer, *the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face*

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- We can also say that the blessed and righteous ones have entered into covenant with God
- The blessed and righteous ones do more than enter into covenant with God; they also *pursue* Him with a continual seeking
- *the generation*, Describes the race of those who seek Him
- This is the character of His true friends
- The children who seek the face of God are the true believers in Christ
- *seek Him*, It indicates an earnest desire to know Him

The Conditions of Entering His Sanctuary 24:3-6



- *Selah*: This word is only used in Book of the Psalms, and in the song of Habakkuk 3:3,9,13
- Much has been written on this word, and still its meaning does not appear to be wholly determined
- Some say it was a musical note, directing the singer either to lift up his voice, or to make a short stop or pause, or to lengthen out the tune
- In general, also, it indicates a pause in the sense, as well as in the musical performance
- Others consider it as an affirmation of the truth of anything, good or bad; meaning "verily", "truly", as, answering to "Amen"; to this sense agrees Aben Ezra



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- The first section of this psalm declared the greatness of God
- The second section spoke of how man can come into relationship with this great God
- Now the third section welcomes God unto His people by the opening of the *gates*
- It seems that David, having decided to bring forth the ark of God up to Mount Zion, and having seen by the eye of prophecy, the Lord who became Man, ascending to His heavens -- the eternal Zion, he used a military language to welcome the Lord in His victory



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- The Holy Book of Revelation, presents to us in more than one location, a magnificent portrayal of the Savior as the Conqueror, who grants victory to His people, *“And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.”* (Revelation 6:2); also Revelation 16:11-14
- Here is a representation of a triumphant entrance of a king into his royal city and palace; for which the gates use to be wide opened
- There are different meanings which have been attached to this verse



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- One meaning would apply to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday
- Another, according to St. Gregory, St. Athanasius, would refer it to our Lord's descent into Hell, His breaking out the gates of brass, and striking the bars of iron
- A third, according to St. Basil, Theodoret, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, is the outcry and awe of the angels attending our ascended Lord
- Another meaning sees in the verse a prophecy of the Incarnation
- This meaning is adopted by St. Jerome; he would find a spiritual reference to the virtual opening of the gates of heaven by the fact of our Lord's taking flesh upon Himself



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- It may also signify those who once were the slaves of sin, but are now not only free, but *princes*, as God's kings and priests
- *Lift up your heads, O you gates*, Removing the barriers which sin puts between them and God
- When these barriers are gone, then the King of Glory will enter His palace of the believing soul
- In a literal sense David speaks here of the gates and doors of his royal city Zion, through which the ark was now to pass to the tabernacle which he had built for it



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- And he calls these doors everlasting, either on account of the durability of the matter of which they were made; or from his desires and hopes that God would make them everlasting because He loved the gates of Zion, Psalm 87:2
- Or, may be he speaks of the gates of the court of the tabernacle, or of the tabernacle itself, into which the ark, the emblem of the divine presence, was now to be brought
- One can also say that by the ascension of the Lord Christ, the heavenly gates were opened before the believers; For their Heavenly Head ascended, and where the Head is, the body will also be



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- According to St. Augustine, In this psalm, the psalmist refers to the ascension of the Savior in the body to heaven; and to that the angels accompanying Him, call on the heavenly hosts on the doors of heaven, to open up those heavenly gates for the King of Glory to come in; the gates that open up to eternity
- “The Word was not in need for the gates to be opened; as, being the Lord of all, nothing can stand in His way; but it is us who are in such a need. He carried our body; delivered His body to death on our behalf, and by it He, again, paved for us the way to heaven.” Pope St. Athanasius the Apostolic



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- *Who is this King of glory?*, The church or the believers put this question not through ignorance, as the Pharisees, when Christ made His public entrance into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:10; and not in pride and condescension, as Pharaoh, Exodus 5:1; and the Capernaïtes, John 6:42; but as wondering at the glories of His person, and as desirous of knowing more of Him
- *The LORD strong and mighty*, This is the answer to the question; He is no ordinary person
- He is describing Him by His most exalted attributes as a God of power



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- This is in accordance with the idea in verse 1 and 2, where He is represented as the Creator and the Owner of all the earth
- Perhaps, also, there is an allusion to the fact that He is mighty, as distinguished from idols which have no power
- *The Lord mighty in battle; As He was when He was up on the cross*
- When He made an end to sin, demolished and destroyed principalities and powers; abolished death, and destroyed him that had the power of it
- And as He will be at the last day, when the kings of the earth shall make war with Him, and He shall overcome them
Revelation 17:14



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- The repetition here is designed to give force and emphasis to what was spoken and expressed
- However, perhaps there might be one observation on the repeated question of verse 7
- If the meaning for the first one in verse 7 is concerning the Lord, victorious over the grave, was ascending into heaven the second is an anticipation of the end of the world
- He reascends, not now by Himself, but with all the multitude of the redeemed, with all His saints, from the beginning of the world to the last that was written in the Book of Life



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- In a spiritual manner this might be repeated to request and demand the negligent churches and particular believers, to open and let Christ in
- When Jesus entered Jerusalem at the Triumphal Entry, St. Matthew tells us that the city asked, “Who is this?” (Matthew 21:10)
- If they had known who He was, the response should have been, *The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory*
- *The LORD of hosts*, All the hosts of heaven and earth, angels and men, and all other creatures are under His dominion and authority



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- He enters not merely as a victorious warrior, but as the Creator and Ruler and King of the earth and universe
- This marvelous debate proclaimed in this psalm reveals that no one could pass through the everlasting gates, and enters the heavenly sanctuaries, except the Mighty Lord, the Lord of host, the King of Glory
- Before Him alone, the everlasting gates of the heavenly city would open up
- The gates of the temple, not made by human hands; the Savior, *“the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords”* (Revelation 19:16)



The Glorious and Conquering King 24:7-10

- *Selah*, This psalm rightly ends on a reflective pause
- It is no small thing that this King of glory humbled Himself to receive men and even to be received by men
- Glory be to the Father, Whose is the earth and all that therein is; and to the Son, the King of Glory; and to the Holy Spirit, the Righteousness of the God of our salvation

Discussion



- The first two verses of this Psalm confess that God created the earth and those who live on the earth. What part of the Holy Bible does this echo?
- What does it mean to have clean hands and a pure heart?
- What is holiness? What does a holy life look like? Who is someone that comes to mind when you think of holy living?

Discussion



- Who are the generation who seek God?
- Why might David have included a question-and-answer about the King of Glory?
- If you could sum up this entire psalm in one sentence, what would that be?