
A Psalm by David.

PSALM 15: 1 LORD, who shall dwell in your sanctuary? Who shall live on your holy hill?

The important question answered, Who is a proper member of the Church militant? and who shall finally join the Church triumphant? Verse Psa 15:1 contains the question; Psa 15:2-5, the answer.

The title, מזמור לדוד mizmor ledavid, a Psalm of David, has nothing in it particularly worthy of notice. If it were a Psalm composed during the captivity, relating to their return and settlement in their own land, with the restoration of their temple service and all the ordinances of God, and a description of the persons who should then be considered Israelites indeed, the name of David is improperly prefixed. But the subject is of the most general utility, and demands the most solemn and serious attention of all men who profess to believe in the immortality of the soul.

Verse 1

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? - The literal translation of this verse is, "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in the mountain of thy holiness?" For the proper understanding of this question we must note the following particulars: -

1. The tabernacle, which was a kind of moveable temple, was a type of the Church militant, or the state of the people of God in this world.
2. Mount Zion, the holy mount, where the temple was built, was the type of the kingdom of heaven. There the ark became stationary, and was no longer carried about from place to place; and the whole was typical of the rest that remains for the people of God.
3. The Tabernacle was a temporary and frequently-removed building, carried about from place to place, and not long in any one place. Concerning this it is said: מי יגור mi yagur, "Who shall lodge, or sojourn," there? It is not a residence, or dwelling-place, but a place to lodge in for a time.
4. The Temple was a fixed and permanent building; and here it is inquired, מי ישכן mi yiscon, "Who shall dwell, abide," or have his permanent residence, there?
5. The tabernacle being a migratory temple, carried about on the shoulders of the priests and Levites, there was no dwelling there for any; they could but lodge or sojourn.
6. The temple being fixed, the priests, Levites, etc., became permanent occupiers. There was no lodging or sojourning, but permanent residence for all connected with it.
7. The tabernacle is, therefore, a proper type of the Church militant, wandering up and down, tossed by various storms and tempests; the followers of God, having here no continuing city; sojourning only on earth to get a preparation for eternal glory.
8. The temple is also a proper type or emblem of the Church triumphant in heaven. "Here the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." It is the dwelling-place the eternal residence, of all who are faithful unto death, who are made pillars in that temple of God, to go no more out for ever.

The questions therefore are,

1. Who can be considered a fit member of the Church of Christ here below? and,

2. Who shall be made partakers of an endless glory? In answer to these questions, the character of what we may term a true Israelite, or a good Christian, is given in the following particulars: -

PSALM 15: 2 He who walks blamelessly does what is right, and speaks truth in his heart;

Verse 2

He that walketh uprightly - הולך תמים holech tamim,

1. He walks perfectly. Who sets God before his eyes, takes his word for the rule of his conduct, considers himself a sojourner on earth, and is continually walking to the kingdom of God. He acts according to the perfections of God's law; he has respect to all its parts, and feels the weight and importance of all its injunctions.

And worketh righteousness -

2. He is not satisfied with a contemplative life; he has duties to perform. The law of righteousness has placed him in certain relations, and each of these relations has its peculiar duties. פעל צדק poel tsedek, the words here used, signify to give just weight, to render to all their dues.

1. As he is the creature of God, he has duties to perform to him. He owes God his heart: May son, give me thy heart; and should love him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is giving God his due.

2. As a member of civil society, he has various duties to perform to his fellows, as they have to him. He is to love them as himself, and do unto all men as he would they should do unto him.

3. There are duties which he owes to himself. That his body may be in health, vigor, and activity, he should avoid every thing by which it might be injured, particularly all excesses in eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. That his soul may be saved, he should avoid all sin; all irregular and disorderly passions. He owes it to his soul to apply to God for that grace which produces repentance, faith, and holiness; and in order to get all these blessings, he should read, watch, pray, hear the word preached, and diligently use all the ordinances of God. He who acts not thus, defrauds both his body and soul: but the person in the text works righteousness - gives to all their due; and thus keeps a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man.

And speaketh the truth in his heart -

3. He is a true man; in him there is no false way. He is no man of pretenses; speaking one thing, and meaning another. He professes nothing but what he feels and intends; with him there are no hollow friendships, vain compliments, nor empty professions of esteem, love, regard, or friendship. His mouth speaks nothing but what his heart dictates. His heart, his tongue, and his hand, are all in unison. Hypocrisy, guile, and deceit, have no place in his soul.

PSALM 15: 3 He who doesn't slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his friend, nor casts slurs against his fellow man;

Verse 3

He that backbiteth not with his tongue - לא רגל על לשונו lo ragal al leshono, "he foots not upon his tongue."

4. He is one who treats his neighbor with respect. He says nothing that might injure him in his character, person, or property; he forgets no calumny, he is author of no slander, he insinuates nothing by which his neighbor may be injured. The tongue, because of its slanderous conversation, is represented in the nervous original as kicking about the character of an absent person; a very common vice, and as destructive as it is common: but the man who expects to see God abhors it, and backbites not with his tongue. The words backbite and backbiter come from the Anglo-Saxon bac, the back, and to bite. How it came to be used in the sense it has in our language, seems at first view unaccountable; but it was intended to convey the treble sense of knavishness, cowardice, and brutality. He is a knave, who would rob you of your good name; he is a coward, that would speak of you in your absence what he dared not to do in your presence; and only an ill-conditioned dog would fly at and bite your back when your face was turned. All these three ideas are included in the term; and they all meet in the detractor and calumniator. His tongue is the tongue of a knave, a coward, and a dog. Such a person, of course, has no right to the privileges of the Church militant, and none of his disposition can ever see God.

Nor doeth evil to his neighbor -

5. 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; he occasions him no wrong. On the contrary, he gives him his due. See under the second particular.

Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour -

6. The word חרפה cherpah, which we here translate a reproach, comes from חרף charaph, to strip, or make bare, to deprive one of his garments; hence חרף choreph, the winter, because it strips the fields of their clothing, and the trees of their foliage. By this, nature appears to be dishonored and disgraced. The application is easy: a man, for instance, of a good character is reported to have done something wrong: the tale is spread, and the slanderers and backbiters carry it about; and thus the man is stripped of his fair character, of his clothing of righteousness, truth, and honesty. All may be false; or the man, in an hour of the power of darkness, may have been tempted and overcoxned; may have been wounded in the cloudy and dark day, and deeply mourns his fall before God. Who that has not the heart of a devil would not strive rather to cover than make bare the fault? Those who feed, as the proverb says, like the flies, passing over all a man's whole parts to light upon his wounds, will take up the tale, and carry it about. Such, in the course of their diabolic work, carry the story of scandal to the righteous man; to him who loves his God and his neighbor. But what reception has the tale-bearer? The good man taketh it not up; לא נשא lo nasa, he will not bear it; it shall not be propagated from him. He cannot prevent the detractor from laying it down; but it is in his power not to take it up: and thus the progress of the slander may be arrested. He taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour; and the tale-bearer is probably discouraged from carrying it to another door. Reader, drive the slanderer of your neighbor far away from you: ever remembering that in the law of God, as well as in the law of the land, "the receiver is as bad as the thief."

PSALM 15: 4 In whose eyes a vile man is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; he who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and doesn't change;

Verse 4

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned -

7. This man judges of others by their conduct; he tries no man's heart. He knows men only by the fruits they bear; and thus he gains knowledge of the principle from which they proceed. A vile person, נמאס nimas, the reprobate, one abandoned to sin; is despised, נבזה nibzeh, is loathsome, as if he were covered with the elephantiasis or leprosy, for so the word implies. He may be rich, he may be learned, he may be a great man and honorable with his master, in high offices in the state; but if he be a spiritual leper, an infidel, a profligate, the righteous man must despise him, and hold him, because he is an enemy to God and to man, in sovereign contempt. If he be in power, he will not treat him as if worthy of his dignity; while he respects the office he will detest the man. And this is quite right; for the popular odium should ever be pointed against vice.

Aben Ezra gives a curious turn to this clause, which he translates thus: "He is mean and contemptible in his own eyes;" and it is certain that the original, נבזה בעיניו נמאס nibzeh beeynaiv nimas, will bear this translation. His paraphrase on it is beautiful: "A pious man, whatever good he may have done, and however concordant to the Divine law he may have walked, considers all this of no worth, compared with what it was his duty to do for the glory of his Creator." A sentiment very like that of our Lord, Luk 17:10 : "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."

Taken in this sense, the words intimate, that the man who is truly pious, who is a proper member of the Church militant, and is going straight to the Church triumphant, is truly humble; he knows he has nothing but what he has received, he has no merit, he trusts not in himself, but in the living God. He renounces his own righteousness, and trusts in the eternal mercy of God through the infinitely meritorious atonement made by Jesus Christ. The language of his heart is: - "I loathe myself when God I see, And into nothing fall;

Content that thou exalted be, And Christ be all in all."

He honoureth them that fear the Lord -

8. This cause is a proof, however just the sentiment, that Aben Ezra has mistaken the meaning of the preceding clause. The truly pious man, while he has in contempt the honorable and right honorable profligate, yet honors them that fear the Lord, though found in the most abject poverty; though, with Job, on the dunghill, or, with Lazarus, covered with sores at the rich man's gate. Character is the object of his attention; persons and circumstances are of minor importance.

The fear of the Lord is often taken for the whole of religion; and sometimes for that reverence which a man feels for the majesty and holiness of God, that induces him to hate and depart from evil. Here it may signify the lowest degree of religion, repentance whereby we forsake sin.

Sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not -

9. If at any time he have bound himself by a solemn engagement to do so and so, and he finds afterwards that to keep his oath will be greatly to his damage; yet such reverence has he for God and for truth that he will not change, be the consequences what they may. He is faithful also to his promises; his bare word will bind him equally with an oath. He that will not be honest without an oath will not be honest with one.

The Hebrew might be thus translated: "He sweareth to afflict himself, and does not change;" and thus the Chaldee has rendered this clause. He has promised to the Lord to keep his body under, and bring it into subjection; to deny himself that he may not pamper the flesh, and have the more to give to the poor.

PSALM 15: 5 he who doesn't lend out his money for usury, nor take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be shaken.

Verse 5

Putteth not out his money to usury -

10. As usury signifies unlawful interest, or that which is got by taking advantage of the necessity of a distressed neighbor, no man that fears God can be guilty of it. The word נשך neshech, which we translate usury, comes from nashach, to bite as a serpent; and here must signify that biting or devouring usury, which ruins the man who has it to pay. "The increase of usury is called נשך neshech, because it resembles the biting of a serpent. For as this is so small at first, as scarcely to be perceptible, but the venom soon spreads and diffuses itself till it reaches the vitals; so the increase of usury, which at first is not perceived nor felt, at length grows so much as by degrees to devour another's substance." Middoch's edition of Leigh's *Critica Sacra*, sub voce נשך.

The Jews ever were, and are still, remarkable for usury and usurious contracts; and a Jew that is saved from it is in the fair way, charity would suppose, to the kingdom of heaven. The Roman laws condemned the usurer to the forfeiture of four times the sum. Cato de Rust., lib. i.

Nor taketh reward against the innocent -

11. He neither gives nor receives a bribe in order to pervert justice or injure an innocent man in his cause. The lawyer, who sees a poor man opposed by a rich man, who, though he is convinced in his conscience that the poor man has justice and right on his side, yet takes the larger fee from the rich man to plead against the poor man, has in fact taken a bribe against the innocent, and without the most signal interposition of the mercy of God, is as sure of hell as if he were already there.

He that doeth these things - He in whose character all these excellences meet, though still much more is necessary under the Christian dispensation, shall never be moved - he shall stand fast for ever. He is an upright, honest man, and God will ever be his support.

Now we have the important question answered, Who shall go to heaven? The man who to faith in Christ Jesus adds those eleven moral excellences which have been already enumerated. And only such a character is fit for a place in the Church of Christ.

On this verse there is a singular reading in my old MS. Psalter, which I must notice. The clause, Qui pecuniam suam non dedit ad usuram, "who putteth not out his money to usury," is thus translated: He that gat nout his catel til oker. Now this intimates that the author had either read pecudem, Cattle, for pecuniam, Money; or that catel was the only money current in his time and country. And indeed it has long been the case, that the Scottish peasantry paid their rents in kind; so many cows or sheep given to the laird for the usufruct of the ground. That this is no mistake in the translation is evident enough from the paraphrase, where he repeats the words, with his gloss upon them: He that

gaf nout his Catel till oker bodyly als covaytus men dos gastly: that he seke nught for his gude dede,
na mede of this werld, bot anely of heven.

The very unusual word oker signifies produce of any kind, whether of cattle, land, money, or even the human offspring. It is found in the Anglo-Saxon, the Gothic, the German, and the Danish; in all which languages it signifies produce, fruit, offspring, usury, and the like. Dr. Jameson does not show the word in any of its forms, though it is evident that it existed in the ancient Scotttsh language.

The word catel may be used here for chattels, substance of any kind, moveable or immoveable; but this word itself was originally derived from cattle, which were from the beginning the principal substance or riches of the inhabitants of the country. Indeed the word pecunia, money, was derived from pecus, cattle, which were no longer used as a medium of commerce when silver and gold came into use. There is a passage in Chaucer where cattel catching seems to be used for getting money.

Speaking of the wicked priests of his time, he says: -

Some on her churches dwell

Apparailled poorely proud of porte;

The seven Sacramentes thei doen sell,

In Cattel catching is her comfort.

Of each matter thei wollen mell;

And doen hem wrong is her disport.

To affraie the people thei been fell

And hold hem lower than doeth the Lorde.

Plowmanne's Tale, 3d part.