

Psalm 15

Building upon the rock

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THIS SHORT PSALM has very great value in keeping before our eyes the vision of the Kingdom of God, and in exhorting us of the way wherein we must walk. It is entitled "A Psalm of David"; and if, like David, we would be a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), a person who thinks and behaves like God, then we must apply ourselves to this psalm.

v. 1. "LORD [Yahweh], who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?"

The word translated "abide" has a meaning of 'temporarily sojourn', whilst the parallel word "dwell" is indicative of a permanent settling.¹ With the tabernacle representing the temporary abode of the ecclesia now (*cf.* Ex. 33:7), the holy hill, described by Yahweh as "My holy hill of Zion" in Psalm 2:6, is a term referring to the temple complex as described in Ezekiel's prophecy. It is plain, therefore, that the principles described in the psalm are those to be manifested in members of the ecclesia in this life and in the life to come as well.

There follow twelve ordinances which must be obeyed by those who would seek to worship Yahweh, not only now but also in the Kingdom. Seven of these are expressed positively and five negatively, with the confirmatory statement at the end, "He that doeth these things shall never be moved".

v. 2. "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart"

Just as walking involves the activity of the whole body from head to toe, the concept of walking uprightly or spiritually, as opposed to walking in the counsel of the wicked (Ps. 1:1), involves the whole body from head to toe walking according to the law of God. The reader is thereby reminded of men of faith, such as Enoch and Noah, who walked with God (Gen. 5:22; 6:9). Indeed, the Hebrew word translated "uprightly" in Psalm 15:2 is translated as 'perfect' in other places, in-

cluding Genesis 6:9, which reads, "Noah was a just man and *perfect* in his generations, and Noah walked with God".

Further, it is necessary for the faithful Jew or Gentile to 'work righteousness', to be continually industrious in doing what is right in the eyes of God; and these words are cited in Acts 10:35. An occasional association with the Truth is totally inadequate.

To speak the truth in his heart involves the man after God's own heart not speaking for outward show, nor being afraid of being a dissenting voice by contending for the faith, but speaking with a good conscience, and "preach[ing] the word; be[ing] instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). Those who are to appear on Mount Zion with the Lamb are portrayed in the words, "And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5).

v. 3. "He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour"

After three positive principles, there follow three negatives. The verb "backbiteth" is elsewhere translated as 'to spy', and thus the exhortation is to eschew using the tongue to search out the faults and weaknesses of others. The Hebrew words for "evil" and "neighbour" comprise the same consonants with different vowels, and it is likely that the Spirit is making a play on these two words, indicating a ploy to treat a person as a friend but really seeking to do him harm. The final clause, "nor taketh up a reproach", has the idea of seizing upon information which disparages those who dwell alongside (Rom. 14:10). It is very easy indeed for all of us consciously or unconsciously to transgress in this way, and James includes even himself in his reproof to the syna-

1. The psalm is a form of Hebrew poetry employing constructive parallelism, in which a statement is followed by another which develops the first.

gogue: "but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (Jas. 3:8-10).

v. 4. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD [Yahweh]. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not"

These two principles are quite foreign to the spirit of the world in which we live, where there is a dominant principle of toleration of every deviation. A "vile person" in the Hebrew means one who is reprobate or rejected, and is used, for example, of the nation of Judah, of which Jeremiah records, "the LORD [Yahweh] hath *rejected* them" (6:30) because "they have *rejected* the word of the LORD [Yahweh]" (8:9). To be contemned contains the idea of being despised, in the sense of not being valued as a source of knowledge and wisdom (*cf.* Num. 15:31). Those who have apostatised from the Truth obviously fall into that category.

The man after God's own heart does, however, value, give weight to, those who fear Yahweh; and again, it appears that Peter cites this in Acts 10:35. Abraham is the first person in Scripture of whom it is recorded that he feared God (Gen. 22:12), and the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10).

Under the theocratic and national organisation of Israel under the Law of Moses, judicial and personal oaths had a use among a hardhearted people. But today, where God has visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15:14), brethren and sisters cannot swear oaths to a godless authority and thereby lose a freedom of conscience to act according to the law of Christ (4:19; 5:29).

Further, disciples of Christ must always speak with veracity (see Ephesians 4:25, a verse which refers to verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 15), and therefore an oath would convey the impression that the believer might not be fully trustworthy in his statements not covered by an oath. As James writes: "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (5:12; *cf.* Mt. 5:33-37).

Our allegiance is to Christ, with whom we have entered into a covenant relationship, and

there is a sense and relevance for us in the words of Ecclesiastes 8:2,3: "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of His sight: stand not in an evil thing; for He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him". Sometimes, with regard to our personal welfare in this life, we have 'sworn' to our own hurt, for we look not to the things which are seen but those that are unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). But we must 'change not', for "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mt. 24:13).

v. 5. "He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved"

Under the Law of Moses, Israel were not permitted to charge interest on a loan to a brother, although they were permitted to do so to a foreigner (Deut. 23:19,20). If there happen to be such financial transactions between brethren today, perhaps the Mosaic ordinance could form guidance for a creditor brother. However, the pertinent point is the principle of not seeking to profit from the misfortune of other brethren and sisters.

The final ordinance of not taking reward against the innocent still has relevance, in that the man after God's heart must not show partiality (Jas. 2:1-10), or indeed seek to ingratiate himself with a section of the ecclesia by siding with that group against another by wresting judgement (Deut. 16:19; 1 Cor. 3:3,4). Sometimes it appears that family relationships in ecclesias can encourage partiality to this latter end.

The keeping of the ordinances, both positive and also negative, has to be actively pursued, as described in the words in the final statement, "He that doeth these things". It is not a matter of capricious application, it is a matter of who will be in the future Kingdom. The wicked will be removed in that day (Ps. 1:5), but those accounted righteous will not be moved. As it is written: "They that trust in the LORD [Yahweh] shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD [Yahweh] is round about His people from henceforth even for ever" (125:1,2).

Again, citing the words of Deity manifest in the flesh, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Mt. 7:24).