



Psalm 15 - Who Shall Abide in God's Sanctuary?

A Psalm of David.

Introduction

This is a hymn celebrating the ideal worshipper of the Lord. Some call it an entrance liturgy, prescribing questions and answers by which the priests examine would-be worshippers for their qualifications for entering holy space. This is unlikely, however, since the qualities described in this hymn are matters of the heart, and thus no priest could know whether or not they were present. Similar passages appear in Psalm 24:3-6 and Isaiah 33:14-16. The singing congregation does not claim to have achieved these character qualities; instead, in describing them, the members yearn to have them more and more.

In this Psalm, David meditates over the character of the man received into the presence of God. No precise occasion is associated with this Psalm, but it may well have been to do with the transporting of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel Chapter 6). This was a time when David was very much concerned with the questions asked and answered in this Psalm.

Psalm 15:1 - Question: Who Shall Dwell with God?

The tent, as confirmed in Psalm 27:4-6, and holy hill speak of the sanctuary where God is especially present with his people; to sojourn or dwell there is to be a divinely welcomed guest in God's house, as also confirmed in Psalms 61:4 and 65:4, the end for which humans were made.

- ¹ O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

Psalm 15:1

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? In one sense, David's question here is figurative. Although he, like the sons of Korah, may have wished to live in the house God, refer to Psalm 84:2-4 and 84:10, it was at the same time impossible for him because David was not a priest, he was from the tribe of Judah not Levi.

The word translated **abide** can be better thought of as sojourn; it describes a visit, receiving the hospitality of a tent-dwelling host. This opening is understood in light of the customs of hospitality in the ancient near east.

The **tent** or tabernacle of God was the great tent of meeting that God told Moses and Israel to build for him during the Exodus as described in Exodus Chapters 25-31. This tabernacle survived through several centuries, and at David's time seems to have been at Gibeon: *<<And he left the priest Zadok and his kindred the priests before the tabernacle of the Lord in the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt-offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt-offering regularly, morning and evening, according to all that is written in the law of the Lord that he commanded Israel>>* (1 Chronicles 16:39-40). Since the tabernacle was the place where man met with God through the administration of the priests and sacrifice, David's longing to **abide in your tent** is actually a desire to abide in the presence of God. David has in mind the life that lives in the presence of God; a life where one walks in close fellowship with God because the heart, the mind, and the life are all in step with the heart, mind, and life of God. This is what the apostle describes as walking in the truth: *<<I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father>>* (2 John 4), and: *<<I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth>>* (3 John 3-4).

Who may dwell on your holy hill? In one sense, David here simply uses the Hebrew technique of repetition to ask the same question as in the first part of the verse. The word **dwell** here has a more permanent sense than the word **abide** in the previous line. It is as if David wrote, 'Who may be received as a guest into God's tent, enjoying all the protections of his hospitality? Who may live as a citizen in his holy hill?' Yet in another sense, David asks a second, more intense question. At this time, the tabernacle of God was probably at Gibeon as already noted and remained there even after the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem: *<<The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar>>* (1 Kings 3:4). Depending upon when David wrote this Psalm, it may very well be that the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17), and even at the holy hill of Moriah, where God had told David to build the temple; refer to 2 Samuel 24:18-21 and 1 Chronicles 21:28-22:5. Since the tabernacle was not at

God's holy hill in David's time, although the Ark of the Covenant was, David has two different, yet similar in meaning, places in mind.

Psalm 15:2-4 - Answer: He Who Walks Blamelessly.

The terms 'walk blamelessly', and 'do what is right' (v.2) are general, and the rest of the answer spells out some specific examples. One striking feature of these specifics is that they are matters of character and go beyond what the laws of the Pentateuch require. Another interesting feature is the social orientation of these specifics, i.e. they are aimed at promoting the well-being of other members of God's people – by speaking honestly (v.2), by protecting their welfare and reputation (v.3), by promoting their holiness (v.4), and by seeking justice above personal gain (vv.4c-5b).

- ² Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
- ³ who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;
- ⁴ in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honour those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

Psalm 15:2-4

Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right. In describing the character of the man who can live in God's presence David begins with two general descriptions walk blamelessly, and do what is right. In one sense David speaks from an Old Covenant perspective. Although the Old Covenant gave an important place to sacrifice and receive atonement through blood, it also based blessing and cursing on obedience, i.e. Leviticus Chapter 26 and Deuteronomy Chapter 28. The disobedient could not expect blessing, including the blessing of God's presence. The New Covenant reveals a different ground for blessing and relationship with God: the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Under the New Covenant, faith and not performance is the basis for blessing. Nevertheless, David's principle is also accurate under the New Covenant in this sense: the conduct of one's life is a reflection of their fellowship with God. As John wrote: <<***If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true***>> (1 John 1:6). It might be said that under the Old Covenant a righteous walk was the precondition for fellowship with God; under the New Covenant a righteous walk is the result of fellowship with God, founded on faith.

Speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue. David here understood that an upright and righteous life is known by the way someone speaks. As Jesus said: <<*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*>> (Matthew 12:34).

Do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbours. David also knew that righteousness is expressed in the way believers treat one another. One might have thought David would give greater priority to religious obligations such as sacrifice or purification ceremonies, which certainly have their place, but are useless without the practical godliness of being good and honest and honourable to neighbours and friends. In these words of David the deeper work of Jesus Christ can also be seen, who commanded his followers to not only love their neighbour and friend, but also to love their enemies and those who spitefully use or abuse them: <<*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*>> (Matthew 5:44).

The wicked are the members of God's people who reject covenant life and are thus themselves rejected by God, as confirmed in: <<*They are called 'rejected silver', for the Lord has rejected them*>> (Jeremiah 6:30). Such people are despised because they bring disgrace on the God whose people they are.

Those who fear the Lord are the people who embrace the covenant, and the ideal person honours them. Such people do not change but stand by their oath even to their hurt, i.e. they keep their promises and do not seek to get out of them, even if that ends up being costly to them, because when they swear they have taken God as their witness.

Psalm 15:5 - Assurance: Such a Person Shall Never Be Moved.

The person who has embraced the covenant promises may be confident that God will ensure his stability; refer also to Psalms 21:7 and 55:22.

- ⁵ who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Psalm 15:5

Do not lend money at interest. When the Pentateuch laws regulate loans, they are generally envisioning private loans to a neighbour, for example when his crops fail and he needs help buying seed for planting, rather than commercial transactions, for the Bible does not speak against commercial investments: <<*Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest*>> (Matthew

25:27), although this was said in a spiritual context. In such cases Israelites are forbidden to charge interest to their fellow Israelites: <<***You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess***>> (Deuteronomy 23:19-20); they may charge interest to a foreigner. The psalm does not mention 'his brother,' which seems to suggest that the ideal person deals generously and fairly with all people; he goes beyond what the law requires.

To take a bribe against the innocent is an outrage against the justice that should characterise God's people: <<***You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right***>> (Deuteronomy 16:19), and: <<'Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' ***All the people shall say, 'Amen!'***>> (Deuteronomy 27:25); it also scorns the very character of God: <<***For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe***>> (Deuteronomy 10:17).

Those who do these things shall never be moved. David has in mind the basic performance-based system of the Old Covenant. The one who has pleased God with this kind performance can expect blessing from God. In the Old Covenant system, this stability of life is a blessing from God given to the obedient. Under the New Covenant the promise of stability and security is given to those who abide in faith, such faith being evident through a life lived in general obedience. The idea behind shall never be moved is that this righteous one will be a guest in the tent of God forever, as in: <<***Let me abide in your tent for ever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings***>> (Psalm 61:4). In NT words it could be expressed it like this: <<***And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live for ever***>> (1 John 2:17)