

Psalm 15. David asks what kind of man can dwell on God's holy hill? Who can approach God? He says it's only the person who perfectly matches God's standard.

The glory of God was never quite forgotten after He delivered His people from Egypt. The *Tanakh* repeatedly looked back on the Exodus (Jdg 6:9; 1 Sam 10:18; Psa 66:6, 78:13), and the feast of Passover has been celebrated for 3,500 years in remembrance of it. Ten plagues fell upon Egypt including the Nile turning to blood, locusts overrunning the land, fire raining out of heaven, and death. Pharaoh had little choice but to release Israel, for who could contend with a God such as this?

The miracles were God's declaration to the world that there is none like Him (Ex 9:14). The Egyptians worshipped Ra, the sun god who was devoured each night by Nut. They bowed before Osiris, the god of the underworld who was murdered by his brother Seth. They esteemed Shu, Sobek, Isis, Khepri and many others. Each plague was a shot fired directly at one of Egypt's principle deities.

Exodus 15:11—"Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"

Israel was formed into a nation at this time, and at the outset, God wanted His people to know He's unlike any other. He's unique in every way, set apart, distinct. His character isn't similar to other gods, and His requirements for worship are different. In a word, God is holy. In all Moses wrote following the Exodus, nowhere in Scripture is God's holiness more emphasized than in these books.

If God is so different, how can man approach Him? Who can stand in His presence? According to Psalm 15, it is the person who's holy as God is holy. He must be perfect in his character, speech, values, integrity, and finances.

A SOUL-SEARCHING INQUIRY

Psalm 15:1—A PSALM OF DAVID. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

David was an unknown shepherd boy who became the greatest king in Israel's history. He had reason to boast of his accomplishments, but before the Lord, David knew he was just a man like any other man in need of a savior.

Psalm 15 asks: "Who can sojourn in God's tent?" From the time of Moses to David, worshippers met with God at a tent-like temple called the tabernacle. David selected Jerusalem as the Capitol of Israel, and he had the tabernacle relocated there. Whether the tent was in Jerusalem, Nob, Shiloh, or Gilgal worshippers had to travel. This tent was the place that symbolized God's presence on earth, and being a man who loved God, David wanted to be there.

The king lived in Jerusalem, a city resting at 2500' with valleys on all sides. Many dwelt there, but no one ever dwelt on the "holy hill"—a symbol of the tabernacle within Jerusalem. Worshippers came and went, and no one except the high priest ever entered into the Holy of Holies. When he did enter, it wasn't long—only once a year and for minutes even then (Lev 16).

David's thoughts were drawn away from the cares of this world by a longing to be with the Lord. He wrote this psalm wanting to be the kind of man who could actually enter the Holy of Holies and stay there forever. Is it any wonder why he was called a man after God's own heart? Skim through the psalms. David was the King of Israel, and yet, he says there's only one thing he wants in life: to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze upon God's beauty, and to speak with Him (Psalm 27:4). May that be the desire of your heart.

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

This political leader wasn't trying to build heaven on earth; he was seeking heaven from earth. There was another world that David longed to see. It wasn't a world he could build through public policy, but one God had built for those who love Him (Heb 11:10). The psalms are filled with glorious thoughts expressing a desire to be there. In Psalm 15, he meditates on the kind of man who can approach God, because this is the kind of man he wanted to be.

CHARACTER

Psalm 15:2—He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

The man who abides with the Lord has exemplary conduct—blameless. He does what is right externally and speaks truth in his heart internally. He's pure on the inside and out without a hint of hypocrisy.

On the Holy Hill

“Blamelessly” could be translated as “perfectly”. The one who can approach God is the one who walks as perfectly as God. There are no vacillations in his character or shortcomings. Morally, he is solid in his heart and with his hands from one day to the next. It’s a pretty high standard, but Christ Himself reaffirmed it in Matthew 5:48—“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

SPEECH

Psalm 15:3—who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.

Speeches, declarations, verdicts, conversations, arguments, insults, curses, and blessings—all of these come from the tongue. Whether intentionally or accidentally, what comes out of our mouth has awesome potential. Truly, “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov 18:21).

The psalmist says the man who stands in God’s presence doesn’t “slander”. More literally, he doesn’t have a wandering tongue. His words don’t loosely flow from mind to mouth, but he chooses his words carefully (Jas 3:1-12). His words do no evil to others. In fact, even when it’s advantageous to speak ill of another, he refuses the opportunity. His speech is a blessing.

VALUES

Psalm 15:4a—In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD.

Our society increasingly calls good evil and evil good. It doesn’t take long to see how it exalts ungodliness while despising godliness. Not tethered to any absolute standard, our value system is in a free fall.

The man who will dwell with the Lord has the same value system as the Lord Himself. Because he values godliness, he honors those who fear God. In contrast is the “vile person.” The word refers to one who’s “being rejected” by God. Similar to Paul’s warning in Romans 1:24, there are people whom God has given over to their sin.

INTEGRITY

Psalm 15:4b—Who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

Did you know your integrity is revealed when there’s a cost? It’s not hard to make a promise or enter into a contract, but try keeping it when breaking it is to your advantage. The man who pleases God “does not change” after he’s made a commitment.

The Hebrew text is pretty emphatic about this point. When this kind of man says ‘yes’ or ‘no’ it’s never nuanced giving him wiggle room. He means what he says and follows through.

FINANCES

Psalm 15:5a—Who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

It’s everywhere you want to be. The slogan sounds so warm until your monthly statement arrives. Charging interest in itself is fine; extortion isn’t. The psalmist parallels, “Put out his money at interest” with, “take a bribe against the innocent.” In both cases, one profits by harming another.

The man whom God approves may be wealthy, but the potential for profit hasn’t undermined his principles. He isn’t a slave of money, he doesn’t want to harm the most vulnerable, he can’t be bought. This kind of man regards his temporal gains on earth as little compared to his eternal treasure in Heaven (Matt 6:20-21; James 5:1-6).

A SOLID GUARANTEE (V. 5B)

Psalm 15:5—He who does these things shall never be moved.

The one who is pure in his character, speech, values, integrity, and finances “shall never be moved” from God’s presence. Psalm 15 is a good measuring stick for evaluating our lives, but who fully measures up? If we’re honest, all of us fall short in each of these ways.

No one is worthy to stand in God’s presence. Like David, we are sinners who need the grace of God that only comes through faith in His Messiah (Eph 2:8-9). Christ lived a perfectly righteous life, and by faith, His righteousness becomes yours. This is the only sure way for dwelling in the presence of the Lord forever.