

Psalm 118:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.

Analysis

This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. The gatekeepers respond to the pilgrim's request (v. 19), identifying the gate's character and access requirements. Zeh hasha'ar l'YHWH (this is the gate of/to the LORD). The gate leads to God's presence—the temple courts where worshipers approach the Holy One. Tzadikim yavo'u vo (the righteous shall enter it). Tzadikim (righteous ones) indicates moral fitness, covenant faithfulness, right relationship with God—not sinless perfection but forgiven sinners walking in obedience.

The verse establishes entry requirements: righteous may enter; unrighteous may not. This isn't arbitrary exclusion but necessary distinction. God's holiness cannot coexist with unconfessed sin. Psalm 15 elaborates entry requirements: speaking truth, doing right, not slandering, honoring God-fearers. Psalm 24:3-6 asks who may ascend God's hill: those with clean hands and pure hearts, who haven't lifted souls to falsehood. Isaiah 26:2 declares: "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." Yet no human achieves perfect righteousness—all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Access ultimately comes through Christ's righteousness imputed to believers (Romans 5:17-19, 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Historical Context

Temple gatekeepers held important responsibility: maintaining holiness of worship space, examining pilgrims for ceremonial cleanliness, excluding the ceremonially unclean. Levitical law specified who could not enter: those with skin diseases, bodily discharges, recent contact with corpses (Leviticus 12-15). Gentiles could

only enter the outer Court of Gentiles, with stern warnings not to proceed further on pain of death. This physical separation illustrated spiritual truth: sin separates from holy God (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus's healings often restored people to worship—healing lepers, hemorrhaging women, paralyzed men removed barriers to temple access. His death tore the temple veil, opening access to God's presence. Peter declares believers are "living stones" built into spiritual house with Christ as cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-5). Revelation pictures new Jerusalem with gates always open, nothing unclean entering, but only those written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:25-27).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the requirement that only the righteous enter God's presence magnify the necessity of Christ's righteousness?
2. What is the relationship between holiness requirements for worship and grace-based access through Christ?
3. In what ways should believers prepare hearts to 'enter God's gates' when gathering for worship?

Interlinear Text

בָּבָן יְבָשׂ אֹו פָּשׁ עַר זָה
H2088 This gate of the LORD into which the righteous shall enter H0
H8179 H3068 H6662 H935

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 26:2 (Righteousness): Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

Psalms 24:7 (Parallel theme): Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

Psalms 24:9 (Parallel theme): Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

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