

Psalms 15:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

Analysis

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

This opening question frames one of Scripture's most searching examinations of authentic spirituality. The psalm begins not with assertion but with inquiry—perhaps the most important question any soul can ask: What qualifies someone to dwell in God's presence?

"LORD" (יהוה/Yahweh) uses God's covenant name, establishing that this isn't philosophical speculation about deity generally but covenant relationship with Israel's God specifically. The question assumes desire for God's presence and acknowledges that such access requires qualification.

"Abide" (יגור/yagur) means to sojourn, dwell temporarily as a guest. "Dwell" (ישכון/yishkon) means to settle permanently, take up residence. The parallelism intensifies: from temporary guest to permanent resident. Both terms suggest the privilege of living in God's presence requires meeting His standards.

"Thy tabernacle" (אֹהֶלֶךָ/oholekha) refers to the tent-sanctuary where God dwelt among Israel (Exodus 25:8-9). In David's time, this might reference the temporary structure housing the Ark in Jerusalem before Solomon's temple. The tabernacle represented God's holy presence among His people—a place of worship, sacrifice, and divine encounter.

"Thy holy hill" (הַר־קֹדֶשׁ/har-qodshekha) refers to Mount Zion, Jerusalem's

elevation where the tabernacle (later temple) stood. "Holy" (qodesh) means set apart, consecrated, sacred. The hill is holy because of whose presence resides there. The question isn't about geography but worthiness—who is fit to approach holy God?

The remainder of Psalm 15 answers with ethical requirements: integrity, righteousness, truth-speaking, non-slandering, neighbor-honoring, promise-keeping, generosity, incorruptibility (v.2-5). These aren't legalistic requirements for salvation but character qualities reflecting transformed hearts fit for God's presence.

Historical Context

Psalm 15 is attributed to David, likely written after bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). This momentous event—God's throne-presence returning to Israel's capital—would naturally prompt reflection on who is worthy to approach God. The Ark's capture by Philistines (1 Samuel 4-6), Uzzah's death when touching it (2 Samuel 6:6-7), and elaborate preparations for its transport demonstrated God's holiness and humanity's unworthiness.

Ancient Near Eastern temples often had entrance liturgies—requirements recited at temple gates before worshipers could enter. Archaeological evidence from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan reveals ethical requirements for approaching deities. However, pagan requirements were often superficial ritualistic purity. In contrast, Psalm 15 emphasizes moral integrity, relational ethics, financial honesty, and incorruptible character.

The parallel structure with Psalm 24 ("Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?") suggests these may have been used liturgically during temple worship. Psalm 24:4-5 answers: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD."

For Israel under the Mosaic covenant, this psalm would have been read through the lens of Torah—God's law providing the ethical framework for holy living. The

qualities listed in verses 2-5 reflect commandments from the Decalogue and broader Law.

In Christian interpretation, the psalm's impossible standard (who can claim perfect integrity, truthfulness, and blamelessness?) points toward Christ. Only Jesus perfectly fulfilled these requirements. Believers gain access to God's presence not by achieving moral perfection but through Christ's righteousness credited to them (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yet the psalm still instructs Christians about character befitting those redeemed by grace—not as requirements for salvation but as evidences of it.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'abide' in God's tabernacle versus merely visiting occasionally through prayer or church attendance?
2. How does the question format (rather than declarative statement) invite self-examination about your fitness for God's presence?
3. What parallels exist between the Old Testament tabernacle's holiness requirements and New Testament teaching about approaching God?
4. How does Christ's perfect fulfillment of Psalm 15's requirements provide access for imperfect believers?
5. In what ways does desiring to dwell with God motivate pursuing the character qualities described in verses 2-5?

Interlinear Text

יְהוָה	מִי	יָגֹדֹר	בְּאֶהֱלֶךָ	מִי	יִשְׁכֹּן	בְּהִלֵּל
LORD	H4310	who shall abide	in thy tabernacle	H4310	who shall dwell	hill
H3068		H1481	H168		H7931	H2022

קִדְשְׁךָ:

in thy holy

H6944

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 84:4 (Parallel theme): Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

Psalms 61:4 (Temple): I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

Psalms 92:13 (References Lord): Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalms 23:6 (References Lord): Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Hebrews 12:22 (Parallel theme): But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

John 17:24 (Parallel theme): Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

Psalms 3:4 (Holy): I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

Psalms 2:6 (Holy): Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.