

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 1

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Brit Chadashah
ברית חדשה

The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 15

Introduction

1 A Psalm of David.

In this short psalm מִזְמוֹר (*mizmor*), which means a poem that is set to music, we see an excellent example of *Hebrew poetry*.

Hebrew poetry

English poetry is usually defined by rhyme, rhythm, and meter, not so with Biblical Hebrew poetry, which is called *Hebrew parallelism*. It is about repeating an initial thought with variations, so *abide* is paralleled to *dwell*, *integrity* to *righteousness*, and *speaking truth* is to *not to slander*.

This “*Hebrew poetry*” is not just academic, we read this style of poetry in many psalms and here in this psalm we see five *parallelism*, one that stands alone and a general summation, this type of poetry is used to reinforce the thought, in this case the characteristic of the person who desires to live a worshipful life.

Verse 1 Tabernacle Question

1 O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?

Who may dwell on Your holy hill?

Commentary

It is thought that the question of verse 1 (see also Psalm 24:3-6) was originally asked by the Levitical (Tabernacle) guards as the pilgrim would come near the Tabernacle, later the Temple. Much like entering the synagogue today, where a security-guard might ask, “*Who are you?*”, “*Where are you from?*” So it is thought that the Levitical guards of holiness asked “*Who are you and why do you want to draw near to God’s house?*”, “*Who are you that you want to dwell on this Holy Hill?*” A response from the pilgrim is than expected and this we see in verses 2-5, “he who..., he does, ...”.

Friends so too for us, it is a question “*Who are you and why do you want to draw near to God’s house?*” We should ponder this as we will let our thoughts dwell on this psalm. For we too “*have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels*” (Hebrews 12:22). We too need to ask: *may we abide, may we dwell?*

Note on abide and dwell

Your holy hill, this denotes the Temple Mount, Mount Zion, which was understood to be the dwelling place of the LORD (Psalm 43:3). Abide יָגוּר (*yagur*) which shares a root with the word for “stranger”, implies we are stranger as we visit God, and He as the host needs to invite us to be members of the household of God, The word for dwell יָשָׁבֵן (*yish-con*) comes from the same root as שְׁכִינָה “*Shechinah*” the localized presence of God. In a sense we are strangers and aliens as we visiting the earthly footstool of the Lord (Psalms 132:7), His Mountain where the Glory of the Lord resides. And we can abide (dwell) with Him if we do these things.

Verses 2-5 Doing what is right

2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,

And speaks truth in his heart.

3 He does not slander with his tongue,
 Nor does evil to his neighbour,
 Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
 4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,
 But who honours those who fear the Lord;
 He swears to his own hurt and does not change;
 5 He does not put out his money at interest,
 Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
 He who does these things will never be shaken.

Commentary

15:2 Three actions

Walking blamelessly the Hebrew word blamelessly תָּמִים (*tamim*), indicates purity or innocence (2 Samuel 22:24). This word described Jacob (Genesis 25:27), though the English translations predominantly say “quiet”, “plain” or “simple” and described Noah (Genesis 6:9) when used of Jacob and Noah *tamim* means wholehearted devotion to God.

Psalm 119:1 states “*Aleph. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!*” So when the Torah expert came to Yeshua with the question “which is the great commandment in the law?” Yeshua gave the summary: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” And: “*Love your neighbour as yourself*” (Matthew 22:37, 39); these two commands are taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 are the beginning what it means to be walking blamelessly (Psalm 1:1).

Working or doing **righteousness** צְדָקָה (*tsedeq*) can also refer to doing justice. Doing righteousness is a work of the Lord (Psalm 111:3) and we are called to partner with Him in this. By doing this we obtain his peace. Isaiah 32:17 “*And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.*”

Speaking truth אֱמֶת (*emet*), this is translated as honest, truth or faithfulness; this is not only a characteristics of the LORD and His law (19:9; 25:5; 86:11; 119:142) but also one of His Names אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת “*El Emet*” (Psalms 31:5) the Truthful or Faithful God.

15:3 Three avoidances

To slander רָגַל (*ragal*) meaning to be a talebearer, to blacken someone’s reputation, particular behind their back (2 Samuel 19:27). This word properly means ‘*to spy out*’ (Joshua 6:22-25). So God who had given general commands don’t be a talebearer (Leviticus 19:16) and don’t listen to slanderers (Exodus 23:1) tells us, do not spy out things just to be a gossip.

He does **no evil** רָעָה (*ra’ah*) in a general sense this is harm or trouble (Job 2:10). It seems incredible to have to remind worshippers, do no harm, yet sadly this behaviour is seen occasionally even amongst believers in Yeshua. Both in the Torah (Leviticus 19:18) and in the Brit Chadashah we are told to do the opposite, ponder these words that Yeshua taught us in John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Nor takes up a reproach, no taunts of disgrace, but he wants to build up the saints (1 Thessalonians 5:11) by sharing a psalm or a hymn (1 Corinthians 14:26).

15:4

“In whose eyes a reprobate is despised”. The text is difficult, this is reflected in both the translations and the commentaries, does the pilgrim despise the evildoer or does he despise himself? The Radak, (Rabbi David Kimchi) explains this verse as meaning that the person sees himself as “*shameful*” and “*despicable*.” The worshiper is doing what is right and has many fine qualities, yet at the same time recognizes how much more he has to grow and accomplish in order to be the true upright / blameless man. As such he humbly fears the LORD. As worshipers, we ought to humble ourselves before the LORD.

It is then that the Lord can honour those who fear Him. As Solomon observed in Proverbs 22:4 “*The reward of humility is the fear of the LORD, ...*” [JPS].

Now in quick phrases, David brings in three Torah prohibitions for the pilgrim. *He swears to his own hurt and does not change*; refers to a pilgrim who is not like Laban (Genesis 31:41) but is honest even if it cost him much more than it is worth (a good example is Jacob in Genesis 29:26-28), he will pay / repay what he said he would (Numbers 30:2).

15:5 Lends

He does not put out his money at interest to a fellow pilgrim, for this is a Torah prohibition (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

He does not take a bribe against the innocent, the taking of bribes was considered an act of the wicked, this brought about a perversion of the ways justice (Proverbs 17:23) and too was prohibited by Torah (Exodus 23:8).

David then concludes with “*He who does these things will never be shaken*”, if we walk by the requirements of the Word we shall be stable (Psalm 16:8; 62:6; 112:6), a pillar in the House of God. The worshiper is described as Mount Zion which can never be moved, (Psalm 125:1).

Conclusion

This Psalm reads like a summary of a sermon if you look at what the worshiper is supposed to do:

1. Walk with integrity (verse 2),
2. Work righteousness (verse 2),
3. Speak truth (verse 2),
4. Not to slander (verse 3),
5. Nor to do evil (verse 3),
6. Takes up no a reproach (verse 3),
7. Despise reprobates, (walk-in Humility) (verse 4),
8. Honours the saints (verse 4),
9. Swears to his own hurt (verse 4),
10. Does not charge interest for loans (verse 5),
11. Takes no bribe (against the innocent) (verse 5).

Then as today, these laws are holy and good (Romans 7:12), and as we are worshipping pilgrims on a journey we can live by them. As such we; like the faithful Jewish people in Temple times come to Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22) we want to live according to the laws above and worship in His holy place. As such when we come in and when we leave the temple area we want to hear the Levitical guards say to us, “*Shalom Aleichem Go in peace!*”

Yeshua talking with the disciples (John 15:1-17) “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” Friends Yeshua points to the motivation that should be in the life of the pilgrim, we do these commandments because of love.

Friends may we always come back to *abide in His tent, and dwell on His holy hill.*

Selah

Shalom in Messiah

Paul & Sue

Example of Hebrew Parallelism in Psalm 15

Three actions

Walk

Do

Talk

Three Body parts

Hearts

Tongue

Eyes

The Person God Approves

Pair 1 His Character

**2 He who walks with integrity,
and works righteousness,**

Pair 2 His Speech

And speaks truth in his heart.

3 He does not slander with his tongue,

Pair 3 His Conduct

**Nor does evil to his neighbour,
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;**

Pair 4 His Values

**4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,
But who honours those who fear the Lord;**

Pair 5 His Integrity

**He swears to his own hurt and does not change;
*(part probably missing)**

**who keeps his oath [at all times],
[and is faithful] even when it hurts ...**

Pair 6 His Use of Money

**5 He does not put out his money at interest,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.**

General Summary

He who does these things will never be shaken.