

# Psalm 16: Religious Experience



## Psalm 16 (15) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

This is an exquisitely beautiful psalm, a lyrical expression of an intense religious experience, and a declaration of exclusive loyalty to the Lord (compare Psalms 115 and 135). Sadly verses one to three have not been well preserved.

It is possibly a prayer by a priest on the day of his consecration, or of a Levite on the day when he made the offerings (see verses 5-6).

Protect me, O God.  
I turn to you for help.

Compare Psalm 5:11-12

‘Let all who take refuge in you rejoice;  
let them ever sing for joy.  
Spread your protection over them,  
so that those who love your name may exult in you.  
For you, Lord, bless the righteous;  
you cover them with favour as with a shield.’

To you, O Lord, I declare:  
'You are my greatest good.'

I will make all my goodness pass before you,  
and will proclaim before you the name, 'the Lord.'

(Exodus 33:19).

God has put into my heart a marvellous love  
for the faithful who dwell in the land.

‘You shall be called My Delight Is in Her,  
and your land Married;  
for the Lord delights in you,  
and your land shall be married’(Isaiah 62:4).

‘The Lord, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
as on a day of festival’(Zephaniah 3:17).

Those who run after strange gods,  
multiply their sorrows.

Never will I pour their drink offerings of blood,  
I will not utter their names.

In praying these verses we are challenged to look at the  
'idols' that we build in our personal and social lives.

What idols are there in the culture to which we belong?  
Listen to the prophet Ezekiel:

'They have taken their idols into their hearts'(Ezekiel 14:2).

You, Lord, are my chosen portion and my cup.  
It is you yourself who are my prize.  
The lot marked out for me is my delight.  
Welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me.

Each family was given land chosen by lot from a cup (and so judged to be decided by Providence). Levites live from temple taxes and certain sacrifices (Exodus 29:26; Leviticus 7:35; Leviticus 8:29; Numbers 18:8-19). Their real sustenance, however, comes from God.

Other people enjoy the benefits of their inheritance. The psalmist delights in the fact that his inheritance is the Lord. His intimate communion with God more than satisfies his heart, and nothing can distract him from this.

‘The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord’s portion but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them’(Deuteronomy 18:1-2)



Origen writes:

‘The portion (heritage) of Christ is the Father, and also the people whom the Father gives to him ... The person who has renounced everything of this world can say: ‘The Lord is my portion of the inheritance for ever’. The Lord makes himself bread, giving us his teaching and strengthening the heart of whoever eats of it. He makes himself a chalice in the measure in which we contemplate the truth, and he gives the joy of knowledge to whoever drinks from it with love. The true vine offers us the cup and whoever drinks says with gratitude: ‘He has filled my heart with joy’.

I thank you, Lord, for all your blessings.  
It is you who give me counsel.  
Even at night you direct my heart.  
I keep you Lord always before me.

The psalmist feels himself more vulnerable at night to irrational feelings that well up inside him. He has learned to place his trust in the Lord, confident that these feelings reveal the mysterious influence and inspiration of God in his life.

With you at my side, O Lord,  
I will not waver.

Therefore my heart is glad.

My whole being thrills with joy.

Even my flesh rests secure,  
for in You I place my trust.

You do not abandon me to death.

You do not let your faithful see the grave.

The Greek Septuagint replaces 'grave' with 'corruption'. Hence the application of this verse to Jesus in the New Testament (see Acts 2:24-32 and 13:34-39).

Jesus was buried, but he was raised to life and hence did not experience 'corruption'.

You show me the path to life.

Your presence fills me with joy.