

PSALM 26

Psalm 26 is the next composition in the series of Psalms 25–31, which are notable for their focus on themes of covenant and temple. This psalm portrays the preparations the psalmist has made to enter the Lord’s presence in the temple. Psalm 26 is often considered to be related to the temple entry psalms, Psalms 15 and 24, in which pilgrims desiring to ascend to the temple are apparently stopped at the gates and requested that the guardians¹ there give instruction regarding who is worthy to enter the temple: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” (Psalm 24:3).

Psalm 26 apparently presents an individual’s answer to the temple guardians (who are representing the Lord). He asks the Lord to judge and examine, declaring his innocence and compliance with temple entry requirements (verses 1–5). The request to “try my reins [kidneys] and my heart” (verse 2) is essentially an ancient request to “test my heart and my mind.” The psalmist desires to be fully examined by the Lord, in both heart and mind, and found worthy to enter the temple.

After being admitted through the gates, the psalmist goes on to perform a washing ritual before approaching the altar of the temple (verse 6). He declares his love for the temple and his desire to be counted among the righteous (verses 8–11). He pleads for redemption and mercy from the Lord and blesses the Lord in His holy habitation (verses 11–12).

Related verses

Psalms 15:1–5; 24:3–5; 73:13; 118:5–9, 19–21, 26–29; Exodus 29:4; 40:12

¹ These guardians were likely priests; see 2 Kings 25:18. Later, they were Levites; see Ezekiel 44:11; 1 Chronicles 9:17–27.

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