

When it's time for spiritual renewal, God summons his chosen people for a covenant inspection, calling them away from a religiosity to please or appease him, and back to Christian worship flowing from heartfelt gratitude, obedience, and dependence. It's time now, so turn back to Christ your Covenant Lord.

Introduction – In 2018 the Pew Research Center [surveyed](#) Americans who attend religious services at least once or twice a month about their *most* important reason for attending.

Background – The book of Psalms is divided into five “books”. Book 2 psalms are generally characterized by dialogue between Israel and the nations, a feature which is obvious in Psalm 50.

I. Covenant Visitation

A. The theater includes all creation (vv. 1-3)

1. El, Elohim, and Yahweh are the three divine names that open the psalm (cf. Joshua 22:22 for the only biblical parallel). Piling up names and titles for God at the beginning of Psalm 50 has the effect of preparing the worshiper for the solemn nature of the event about to happen. Elohim the Creator-God, and Yahweh the Redeemer-God, are one God: El the Mighty-God. This God addresses the whole earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting (from east to west). In other words, God's judgment is a public spectacle for the whole world to watch.

2. Zion is the location of the LORD's temple in Jerusalem (cf. Ps 48). There he shines forth in the perfection of his beauty (Ezek 27:3-4, 11; 28:12). At Mount Sinai where Israel was first constituted as a nation in covenant with the LORD, God shined forth with his army of angels, surrounded by bright light splendor (Pss 80:1; 94:1; Dt 33:2; cf. Ezek 28:7, 17). God as the divine warrior appeared at Mount Sinai in the cloud (Exo 19-24). His appearance is often accompanied by powerful and dangerous forces: a consuming fire (Exo 19:16, 18; Isa 24; Nah 1; cf. Pss 18:8; 97:3) and a great east-wind storm (Job 38:1; 40:6; Ps 48:7; cf. Isa 40:24; 66:15). God is the divine warrior who descends from heaven onto the mountaintop as the divine lawgiver and judge.

B. The story is Yahweh's imminent arrival to judge (vv. 4-6)

God typically summons the heavens and the earth to serve as witnesses of the covenant (Dt 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1). Why? Verse 4 says, “that he may judge *his people*.” What does God mean by “judge his people”? Verse 5 quickly buries that unsettling thought as God speaks for the first time in the Psalm, his voice thundering from the storm. Verse 6 is their/our response. Selah is normally a vague untranslated word that separates one thought from another in the Psalms. In this case, my guess is Selah functions something like, “You said it—God himself is judge—so get ready for it.”

II. Covenant Inspection

A shocking turn of events in verse 7. Israel expects when God arrives he will assemble them and the rest of the nations so that, in the presence of all, God will judge those who don't worship him as Lord. God is inspecting us and granting the nations a window into what it means for judgment to begin with the house of God (1 Pet 4:17). In this case, the inspection is focused on how God's people measure up to covenant sacrifice and covenant law. Psalm 50 is written for all Israel: the OT nation of Israel, and her fulfillment in the NT—both Jews and Gentiles as the Church of Jesus Christ. *Chesed* is the Hebrew word for God's covenant faithfulness to his people. “My faithful ones” is that word but in the recipient form. So “my faithful ones” are the recipients of his *chesed*, something like “my covenant subjects” (Exo 24:3-8; Zech 9:11; Lk 22:20; Heb 9:15-20; 13:20). “My faithful ones” is everyone connected by covenant to God's church. Jesus called them the wheat and the tares of the kingdom.

A. God's people who are ritual moralists in order to please God (vv. 7-15)

1. With the psalmist's introduction finished, God enters the scene and speaks. First God commends Israel. Most are observant of the sacrificial rites required to approach God in worship. But apparently many had forgotten the purpose and significance of sacrifices—to restore the covenant relationship of love. Here is our first inspection that calls for a course correction. God tells us what he really wants by reminding us he's not hungry or needy, but he does want thankful worship (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24).

2. Ritualistic moralism in worship, what used to be known as formalism, is an ever-present danger for God's people, especially for those churches that take the elements (the rituals) of worship with a serious solemnity. The danger is in going through the external motions without a thankful and obedient inner disposition, and believing that God is content if not elated with us for our externals acts of obedience. The purest external form of worship, if it has no spirit-infused gratitude directed to God, actually invites his judgment!

B. God's people who are credal hypocrites in order to appease God (vv. 16-21)

The "wicked" that God now addresses are the covenant breakers within the covenant community. They profess faith with their mouth and know God's law in their mind, but in their hearts they despise the privileges of the covenant. The wicked are in the habit of reciting God's statutes—in worship and even in the world to gain the trust of faithful people. But God is not fooled. What they're really trying to do is buy off God and keep him at a distance so he has no say in the way they choose to live. God charges are specific violations of the seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments. The hypocritical worshipers are guilty of adultery (v. 18b), stealing (v. 18a), and lying (v. 19), but not in an obvious way. Notice their sins are of the "respectable" sort. The idea is an armchair critic who is calmly assured of his own rightness and his right to judge others. God confronts those who live like this but don't regret it at all. If these respectable sins describe your life, if they flow freely out of your heart and mouth, then hear your Covenant Lord's words in verses 16-17.

III. Covenant Caution

A. Remember God if you want to be delivered from ruin (v. 22)

Since God is the righteous judge, we would expect after covenant visitation and covenant inspection, for covenant judgment to fall. Give thanks and praise to God that his judgment is postponed. He cautions us instead to give us time to repent (2 Pet 3:9). "Consider this" in verse 22 is God calling you to understand. When wicked people in the church think of God in human terms, they essentially forget who God really is (v. 21). If you're secretly or flaunting hypocrisy by denying your profession of faith by hating your neighbor, then only God is able to deliver you from ruin. But he will only do so if you repent and renew your faith commitment with words that bear good fruit.

B. Worship God by giving thanks, paying your vows, and praying to be saved (vv. 14-15, 23)

What is that good fruit? Both thanksgiving and obedience reflect the two primary judgment concerns of Psalm 50. Verse 23 sums up what God wants from his people. All us of, individually and together, must worship God with our bodies, with our external actions, with our words, with our ritual habits prescribed in Scripture, but most of all with our hearts devoted to him, giving thanks in his presence, and living a just and kind life as we fellowship with God's people, our brothers and sisters in the faith. Proverbs 15:7-11 sums it up well.

Conclusion – If you're a professing Christian, a member of God covenant community, then in Psalm 50 you've been visited by God, inspected by God, and cautioned by God. Next time we'll look closely at Psalm 51 which is a terrific response of repentance. Here's a preview (Hebrews 13:11-16). Amen.