

## PSALMS 42-72

### Book Two

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#### **Psalms 42-43: A soul thirsting for God**

The refrain “*Why are you cast down my soul?*”—repeated in 42:6, 12 and 43:5—shows that Psalms 42-43 form a single psalm. It is the prayer of a person who lives outside of Israel’s borders and longs very much to be with the community of believers who worship God in the temple in Jerusalem. The psalmist compares his thirst for God to the thirst of the deer who longs for running streams.

#### **Psalm 44: God’s presence and absence**

*“In this lament the community reminds God of past favors which it has always acknowledged (2-9). But now God has abandoned Israel to defeat and humiliation (10-17), though the people are not conscious of any sin against the covenant (18-23). They struggle with being God’s special people amid divine silence; yet they continue to pray (24-27).”* (NAB, p.630)

#### **Psalm 45: Royal wedding song**

This psalm of joy was written on the occasion of the king’s marriage to a foreign princess. In his book, *Run Away to God – the Psalms as Prayer*, Paschal Botz, O.S.B., writes:

*Tongue and pen go to work eagerly and heap lovely imagery and youthful genius doing honor to a royal couple: first to the king (vv. 2-9), then to his spouse (vv. 10-17). Written in the perspective of God, the whole song envisions a final, greater King, and so it is forward-looking, messianic.*

*God has endowed the bridegroom-king with grace and beauty, strength and skill, and above all, with justice and zeal for the poor. The “oil of gladness” that anoints him king flows from the hand of God.*

*Traditionally Eastern and Western Churches read in this Psalm and espousals of Christ and His Church, with Mary as the original type of the Church. (pp 101-102)*

#### **Psalm 46: A mighty fortress is our God**

Psalm 46 is the first of the so-called “Zion psalms,” hymns that feature the importance and meaning of

Jerusalem in the Lord’s relation to his people and world. It is the biblical text for Martin Luther’s famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Both the psalm and the hymn celebrate the confidence that the people of God may have in his help because of his choice to be with them: in the Psalm, through his presence in the City of God, and in the hymn, through his presence in Christ.

#### **Psalm 47: King of all the Nations**

This hymn calls on the nations to acknowledge the universal rule of Israel’s God (2-5) who is enthroned as king over Israel and the nations (6-10).

#### **Psalm 48: Ruler of all the Nations**

This Zion psalm celebrates and praises God, who is king of the whole world and all the nations in it.

#### **Psalm 49: Apparent failure of God’s justice**

Though often called a “wisdom psalm” because it contains reflections about the human condition, Psalm 49 is really a confession of trust in God. The psalmist struggles with the question as to why a just God allows the wicked to prosper. The wise, however great their wealth, cannot escape death (6-13). In contrast, God will somehow redeem the lives of those who are faithful to his ways.

#### **Psalm 50: The Lord as Judge of his people**

*The psalm is not a hymn or prayer or song of thanksgiving. It is composed on the model of a speech for trial proceedings. It begins with an introduction (vv. 1-6) in which the Lord appears, convenes a court, and summons his covenant people as defendants. The body of the psalm is a speech made by the Lord to put the worship (vv. 7-15) and the conduct (vv. 16-22) of the covenant people under judgment. The speech ends with a summary statement on worship and conduct, a sort of instructive finding of the court (v. 23). (James Mays)*

#### **Psalm 51: The Miserere (“Have mercy on me.”)**

This fourth of the seven Penitential Psalms comes from David’s heart to ours. It is said to be the cry for

mercy that David prayed after his sins of adultery and murder. It is one of the best known prayers in the whole Psalter. *“The psalm is a masterpiece for understanding the depth of a person who is contrite and filled with compunction. The transparency of this person’s crushed heart reaches out to the mercy of God in such an honest confession of sin that both in the synagogue and the church this psalm touches the hearts of those praying it. I, too, have been very moved by this psalm more than the other individual lamentations and have seen others sobbing after praying it”* (Bertrand Buby, S.M.).

### **Psalm 52: The deceitful tongue**

The psalmist strongly condemns the arrogant person who uses the gift of speech to tear others down.

### **Psalm 53: Lament over widespread corruption**

Almost identical to Psalm 14, the psalmist sees two kinds of people: the fool and the just (called “my people”).

### **Psalm 54: Confidence in God in the midst of great peril**

Troubled and attacked by the wicked, the psalmist places his trust in God.

### **Psalm 55: Prayer of a man betrayed by a trusted friend**

The psalmist is in great emotional pain: *“I rock with grief; I groan at the uproar of the enemy, the clamor of the wicked.... My heart pounds within me”* (3:5). He also feels the great pain that is ours when betrayed by a friend: *“If an enemy reviled me, that I could bear.... But it was you, my other self, my comrade and friend, you whose company I enjoyed, at whose side I walked in procession in the house of God”* (14-15). Since there was no belief yet in an afterlife, the psalmist asks God to punish evildoers with a sudden death (16). Finally, in spite of all the evil around him, the psalmist encourages believers *“to cast their cares upon the Lord who will support them”* (23).

### **Psalm 56: Prayer of trust**

The NAB states that this is the prayer of David when his enemies sought to kill him. *“Beset physically (2-3) and psychologically (6-7), the psalmist maintains a firm confidence in God (5:9-10). Nothing will*

*prevent the psalmist from keeping the vow to give thanks for God’s gift of life (13-14). A refrain (5:11-12) divides the psalm in two equal parts”* (NAB, p.38).

### **Psalm 57: “Save me from my enemies, Lord.”**

The victim of hostile actions by enemies prays that God be his refuge and protection. Verses 8-12 are a beautiful expression of a man who is steadfast in his love for God.

### **Psalm 58: The God who judges human judges**

The psalmist pleads with God to dethrone and punish all forces obstructing God’s rule over all the earth. A part of the prayer is pretty vicious by our standards: *“O God, smash the teeth in their mouths...”* (7). *“The prayer is a vehement passionate plea by the powerless for God’s powerful help against the powers of wrong and violence”* (James Mays).

### **Psalm 59: “God, be my strength when my enemies attack me.”**

The psalmist is endangered by the lying tongues of his enemies whose goal is to have him quit on God (8). When he begs God to slay his enemies, he is not seeking blood vengeance as much as asking God’s injustice to intervene. Again, we must remember that the psalmist had no sense of an afterlife justice.

### **Psalm 60: Lament after defeat in battle**

In this community lament, the people dramatize their situation as defeated and deprived of their God-given land. *“The community complains that God has let the enemy win the battle (3-5) and asks for an assurance of victory (6-7). In the oracle God affirms ownership of the land; the invasion of other nations is not permanent and will be reversed ultimately (8-10). With renewed confidence, the community resolves to fight again (11). The opening lament is picked up again (12-14), but this time with new awareness of God’s power and human limitation”* (NAB).

### **Psalm 61: Prayer of the king in time of danger**

*“A lament of the king who feels himself at the brink of death (3) and cries out for the strong and saving presence of God (3b-5). The king cites the prayer being made for him (7-8), and promises to give thanks to God”* (NAB).

### **Psalm 62: God as our rock and security**

This beautiful psalm is a “*sustained declaration of trust in God*” (James Mays). “*The psalmist feels that his ‘soul is at rest in God.’ A song of trust displaying serenity from experiencing God’s power (the refrains of 2-3 and 6-7) and anger toward unjust enemies (4-5). From the experience of being rescued, the psalmist can teach others to trust in God (10-13)*” (NAB).

### **Psalm 63: Longing for God**

The psalmist expresses the thirst of the soul for God, the quenching of that thirst through the presence of God in the sanctuary, and the response of praise as the expression of life itself.

### **Psalm 64: Hide me from the wicked**

The psalmist feels threatened by people who care nothing for God. (See NAB for more.)

### **Psalm 65: Thanksgiving for God’s blessings**

The community, aware of its sinfulness before God, sings this psalm of thanksgiving.

### **Psalm 66: Praising God for his saving deeds**

The people celebrate God’s deeds for them. (See NAB for more.)

### **Psalm 67: “Let the people praise you, O God.”**

This joy-filled psalm which echoes Aaron’s priestly blessing (Num 6:22-27) invites all people to praise the Lord from whom all blessings flow.

### **Psalm 68: Go Our Warrior God**

This psalm is a bit like Exodus 15 in which God is imaged as a ‘warrior God’ fighting and winning Israel’s battles. “*God will arise from battle, the enemy will be scattered...*” (2). (See Nab for more.)

### **Psalm 69: Praying from the pit**

The psalmist finds himself in “the mire of the deep,” where he has no foothold. But yet he keeps faith in God to rescue him (14-15).

### **Psalm 70: “Here I am afflicted and poor.”**

This is the prayer of a person who is both afflicted and poor, and feels he has no recourse but God.

### **Psalm 71: “Do not cast me aside in my old age.”**

*Many a phrase in this Psalm is known to us from other Psalms. That is as we expect from an elderly author who lived all his life in fidelity to the Lord. Sheer, unbounded praise alternates with acts of trust, even as the Psalmist repeatedly begs for divine help more insistently with the advancing years. God is his Rock of refuge and strong fortress from womb to tomb. His venerable gray hair, however, is also the occasion for new trials, recriminations of accusers, and there is no lack of enemies, those who watch to take advantage of him. Old age is not serene and quiet, respected for wisdom of experience, but its spent strength changes over to new anxieties.* (Paschal Botz, O.S.B.)

### **Psalm 72: Prayer for the king**

This royal psalm is a prayer for an anointed king asking God to bring about his rule on earth through the reign of the king.