



Summary of Psalms 42-72

Psalms 42-43 - To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

While each of these psalms can be taken separately, Psalms 42-43 go well together as a song with three stanzas: they share a refrain (42:5, 42:11 and 43:5); 43:2 is almost the same as 42:9; and they both express the longing to return to God's presence in the sanctuary (42:2 and 43:3-4).

In these psalms the singer laments his circumstances, connected with enemies who despise God and oppress his faithful servants, which keep him from attending worship at the central sanctuary. Singing this in corporate worship would especially foster a sense of yearning and expectation in the faithful, so that they would learn to attend worship looking for God's presence, to mourn any circumstances that prevent them from attendance, and to count their attendance at worship as a great gift from God - certainly not a burdensome duty! Other psalms that express yearning for God include Psalms 63 and 84.

Psalm 43

This psalm is either a part of the previous one or is closely connected with it. In fact, in a number of ancient Hebrew manuscripts Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 are joined together as one. They are probably separate psalms, linked by a common problem: spiritual depression.

Psalm 44 - To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Maskil.

This is a hymn for when the people of God as a whole have suffered some great calamity at the hands of their enemies and are seeking God's help. The calamity is particularly painful, since God has chosen his people, given them a special place, and favoured them over their enemies in the past.

The corporate focus is not impersonal, however; each member of the congregation identifies with the whole people, using the singular 'I' (v.4, v.6 and v.15). When

the worshipping congregation sings this, they do more than simply present the request to God; they remind themselves of their privileged standing with God, of the obligation to faith and holiness that is laid upon them, and of God's unfailing loyalty to his purpose for his people. Similar psalms include Psalms 74, 77, 79, 80, and 83. In some cases, the cause for the calamity is mysterious, as here; in others, it is acknowledged as due to the people's unfaithfulness.

Psalm 45 -

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of the Korahites. A Maskil. A love song.

This is a hymn celebrating a royal wedding; as the title says, it is a love song. It is impossible to be sure for which king in David's line the song was first composed, but it does not matter; after 2 Samuel 7:11-16, the line of David was the appointed channel through which God would bless his people and carry out his mission to the whole world. The psalm has sometimes been taken as directly messianic, because Hebrews 1:8-9 cites vv.6-7, applying the verses to Christ.

Psalm 46 - To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamoth. A Song.

The psalm is a hymn celebrating Zion as the special city, to which God has pledged himself and through which he will bless the world. Other psalms like this include Psalms 48, 76, 87 and 122. The psalm has two stanzas, marked by a refrain (v.7 and v.11).

Psalm 47 - To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

This psalm celebrates God's kingship, i.e. his rule over all the earth; refer to the comment made on Psalm 5:2. The promises to Abraham that all peoples will be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3), are founded on the fact that there is only one true God to whom all mankind owes love and loyalty. Psalms 93 and 96-99 have a similar theme as well.

Psalm 48 - A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites.

Like Psalm 46, Psalm 48 is a hymn celebrating Zion as God's special city, which he defends for the sake of the world. It commemorates some great event, in which Gentile powers had besieged Jerusalem but came away dismayed; it recognises that although material fortresses may have their place, it is crucial that God himself be the defence of his people.

Psalm 49 - To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

This is a wisdom psalm, i.e. a hymn that reflects on topics typically covered in the Bible's Wisdom Literature. In particular, it addresses the perplexity that the pious often feel when they encounter trouble, while unfaithful people seem to get along so well. Is not God expected to show his favour for the pious in how he treats

them? The answer is that God will distinguish between the faithful and the unfaithful in what happens to them when they die.

The psalm follows a very simple argument: it calls everyone to pay attention; then it reminds the singers that everyone has a common outcome, namely, all will die; and it finishes by stressing the contrasting destinations for the faithful and the unfaithful. Other psalms that address the same topic include Psalms 37 and 73.

Psalm 50 - A Psalm of Asaph.

It is probably best to describe this psalm as an ‘oracular hymn,’ i.e. with it the worshippers sing God’s pronouncement about how they should live as part of his covenant people. The God who speaks and summons the earth especially plans to judge his own people, particularly to warn any of them who presume on the privileges of the sacrificial system, thinking that it is a way to buy God off, apart from a living relationship with him.

Psalm 51 - To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

This is probably the best known of the ‘Penitential Psalms’, i.e. Psalms 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 130 and 143. According to the title, David composed this psalm as a result of Nathan the prophet convicting him of his sins, both for his adultery with Bathsheba and for his arranging of the murder of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

At the same time, this is more than David’s personal prayer: its instructional elements show that, although the situation that led to the psalm was intensely personal, the psalm in its current form is well-suited to be a hymn by which the members of the worshipping congregation confess their own sins.

As is the case with Psalms 25 and 32, the psalm enables its singers to appeal to God’s own gracious character as the grounds for their cry for forgiveness, echoing Exodus 34:6-7. The psalm also reinforces the view, found in the Levitical system itself, that the sacrifices bestow their benefits only on those who use them in humble and penitent faith.

Psalm 52 - To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech.”

This psalm enables the faithful to develop confidence in God’s care and protection, particularly when surrounded by ruthless enemies. The title sets the psalm during David’s flight from King Saul (1 Samuel 21:1-7), which led to the slaughter at Nob of the priests who had helped David (1 Samuel 22:9-19). Doeg’s report put the priests’ hospitality to David in the worst light; when none of Saul’s Israelite men would strike the priests down, Doeg willingly did so. He is thus an example of the enemies that the faithful might face.

Psalm 53 - To the leader: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David.

This psalm is almost identical to Psalm 14, and the two psalms were probably alternate versions of the same hymn before they were included in the Psalter. The two hymns serve the same function, namely, to mourn the fact that mankind does not seek after God and thus treats God's people cruelly.

The main difference between the two psalms is that 53:5 is as long as 14:5-6 together and thus 53:6 = 14:7. In 53:5 the psalmist describes in greater detail the terror that will befall the wicked instead of emphasising God's care for the poor (14:5-6). Also, Psalm 53 uses *Elohim* for God throughout to refer to the deity, while Psalm 14 uses Yahweh 'the Lord' in several of these places.

Psalm 54 - To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, 'David is in hiding among us.'

This is an individual lament asking, as many laments do, for God's help against those who threaten the lives of the faithful. The title connects the song to the events of 1 Samuel 23:19, where the Ziphites, among whom David was hiding, informed Saul of where David was, promising to hand David over to him.

The psalm directs its singers to God's protection and is therefore well-suited for the pious to use when they are under threat of deadly persecution; for those who do not face such persecution, this psalm is appropriate to sing on behalf of their brothers and sisters who are in danger.

Psalm 55 - To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David.

Like many other individual laments, this psalm prays for God's help against dangerous enemies who hate the faithful. There is a unique twist here, though: the danger comes from betrayal by a close friend who had seemed a fellow pilgrim on the path of life.

Some deny that David could be the author of this psalm, because there is no clear instance of such betrayal in the recorded life of David. However, that misses the point: the psalms are hymns, not merely autobiography. David has provided this psalm for God's people to sing under this kind of duress. In addition, David was betrayed by his son Absalom and by his counsellor Ahithophel in 2 Samuel 15:12 and 16:15-23.

Psalm 56 - To the leader: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. Of David. A Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

Many take this to be an individual lament, but it could also be a psalm of anticipated thanksgiving: the description of troubles and prayer is taken up into gratitude that God has heard and will act, as he has acted in the past.

The specific troubles arise from people who aim to hurt the pious singer, as is common with lament psalms. The title links the psalm to the time when the Philistines captured David in Gath, which is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15 and is similar to Psalm 34. It deals with the period between the visit to the tabernacle at Nob and David's arrival at Adullam. David was alone, desperate, afraid, and not thinking too clearly.

Psalm 57 - To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

This is another individual lament, based on an event in David's life, probably his time at Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1), but possibly the time David could have taken Saul's life in a cave (1 Samuel 24:3); Psalm 142 is likewise from one of these passages. Like Psalms 34, 52, 54, 56, 59, 63 and 142, Psalm 57 arose from Saul's persecution of David.

The psalm has two sections, each ended by the refrain (v.5 and v.11), and each mentioning God's 'steadfast love and faithfulness' (v.3 and v.10), drawing on Exodus 34:6. In the first section (vv.1-5), the dominant strain is cheerful confidence amid danger, while in the second (vv.6-11), the accent is on the expectation of victory, and thus of God's vindication.

The faithful who sing this hymn can identify with David's confidence in the presence of serious dangers, and can look through those dangers to seek God's honour. Psalm 108:1-5, also by David, uses vv.7-11. 'Do not destroy' in the title of Psalms 57, 58, 59 and 75 may be some kind of tune or chant pattern, perhaps influenced by the phrase: *<<I prayed to the Lord and said, 'Lord God, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand'>>* (Deuteronomy 9:26), and: *<<But David said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?'>>* (1 Samuel 26:9).

Psalm 58 - To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam.

God's people should sing this song when they are confronted with injustice among their own rulers; it is thus a community lament. In the time of David, of course, the focus was on those who ruled Israel, a theocracy, which was thus, at least in name, supposed to be governed by the principles of the Pentateuch; and yet Christians may pray this way since the rulers of God's people, indeed all people, everywhere and at all times, ought to embody the highest human ideals of justice.

Singing this in worship helps the faithful to pray more earnestly for godly leadership, and forms in the leaders of the community a true moral compass for their own leadership. It also celebrates the prospect that one day, sooner or later,

God will vindicate his justice in the world, and those who trust him will rejoice exceedingly.

Psalm 59 - To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him.

This is another individual lament, seeking God's protection from enemies who threaten the pious person's life. The title connects the psalm to 1 Samuel 19:11, where David escaped from Saul's men through a window. The psalm is geared for the particular case in which the enmity is <<***for no fault of mine***>> (v.4).

The song has two sections (vv.1-10 and vv.11-17). Verses 6-7, a description of howling dogs, correspond to vv.14-15; and vv.9-10, 'O my strength' and 'steadfast love', correspond to v.17. The first section is a cry for help in the face of fierce and bloodthirsty enemies, and the second section voices confidence that God will protect the singer and make an example of the persecutors.

Psalm 60 - To the leader: according to The Lily of the Covenant. The Lily of the Covenant Testimony is the Hebrew phrase *Shushan eduth* and may refer to an instrument or a tune.

This is a lament for the whole community, at a time when Israel's continued life in the land is under threat from Gentile neighbours. The title says it is 'for instruction'; perhaps this means that it is to instruct the people how to pray when their troops must fight.

The original setting is Israel, which by God's appointment dwelt in the land and was to be the source of blessing to the rest of the world, which often came, at least in Israel's better days, by making the other nations their subjects. Christians, who are not limited to one theocratic nation, recognise that God's process of conquering the Gentiles is through the witness of faithful believers: <<***And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'***>> (Matthew 28:18-20); but they may still use this psalm to pray for God's blessing on this endeavour.

The title seems to link the psalm with the events of 2 Samuel 8:1-14; but 2 Samuel 8:13 reports the number of Edomites killed as eighteen thousand instead of the twelve thousand here. If these are the same events, then probably the different numbers represent different ways of computing the casualties, e.g. twelve thousand could be the number in an earlier report, while eighteen thousand could be the adjusted tally, after some time had passed. The campaign resulted in a great victory for David and brought several Gentile kingdoms under David's rule. This psalm, with its air of lament, would thus represent the prayers of the people

before the campaign had been completed. Verses 5-12 of Psalm 60 are taken up again in Psalm 108:6-13.

Psalm 61 - To the leader: with stringed instruments. Of David.

This is an individual lament of sorts: it serves as a general request for God's help in times of trouble for particular members of God's people. At the same time it is certainly not individualistic: in praying for the Davidic king, vv.6-7 tie royal well-being to the well-being of the whole people; and v.8 looks forward to acts of public worship as the proper result of the help for which the psalm prays.

Psalm 62 - To the leader: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

God's people sing this psalm to foster confidence in his care, especially as they are faced with people who use power and wealth to oppress them. The strong temptation in such a case is either to despair or else to seek security in power and wealth rather than in God. The simplest way to follow the flow of thought in the psalm is to observe how the addressees shift: from a description of 'my soul' and God (vv.1-2), to speaking directly to and about the attackers (vv.3-4), then back to 'my soul' and God (vv.5-7), on to exhorting the whole of the worshipping congregation (vv.8-10), and finally back to a description of God's trustworthiness (vv.11-12).

Psalm 63 - A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

This psalm opens as if it were a lament, seeking God in a time of trouble; and yet the overall flow of the song is one of confident expectation. Hence it is best to see the psalm as enabling each of God's people to develop confidence during their times of trouble. In particular, the psalm inculcates the confidence that the worshipper will indeed be able to return to the sanctuary to worship God.

Biblically, the highest privilege a mortal can enjoy is to be a welcome member of the worshipping congregation; and the psalm, in instilling such confidence, also enables its singers to treasure this worship as the gift that it is. The several references to 'my soul' point to the intensely personal devotion to God that infuses the whole song.

The title links the psalm to David's days as a refugee, but it is not immediately clear whether the reference is to fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 23:14-15 and 24:1), or from Absalom (2 Samuel 15:23-28). The latter may seem more likely, since the author calls himself a king (v.11); as confirmed by also 2 Samuel 16:14 for the term 'weary' found in v.1. On the other hand, the land through which David fled is not normally counted as part of the wilderness of Judah, and David could have thought of himself as a king even when he was fleeing Saul, since Samuel had already anointed him.

Psalm 64 - To the leader. A Psalm of David.

This psalm shares many themes with Psalm 63, namely, confidence in God's victory over those who bring troubles on the righteous. However, since the psalm begins with a request, it is best to see it as an individual lament. The psalm has two parts: a request for help against deadly schemes (vv.1-6), and confident expectation that God will fight on behalf of his faithful (vv.7-10). The psalm presents God's purpose for his victory as instruction for mankind (v.9) and the bringing of joy to the godly (v.10).

Psalm 65 - To the leader. A Psalm of David. A Song.

This is a thanksgiving; the specific occasion is a fruitful harvest (vv.9-13). Perhaps this good harvest has come after a drought, which was seen as a sign of divine displeasure (v.3 and vv.9-10); this is confirmed by: <<***The sky over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land into powder, and only dust shall come down upon you from the sky until you are destroyed***>> (Deuteronomy 28:23-24).

Or perhaps the psalm is celebrating the Festival of Weeks, i.e. Pentecost. The harvest is set in the context of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises (vv.1-8). The Sinai covenant ties together God's grace, the believing response of the people, and the fruitfulness of the land. Singing this song should develop a deep spirit of gratitude in the hearts of the worshippers.

Psalm 66 - To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.

This is a thanksgiving for God's answer to the prayer of a particular member of God's people. Perhaps it was especially suited to the occasion on which a worshipper brought various sacrifices to express his thanks and consecration, as confirmed in vv.13-15. The marvel of this psalm is the way in which the first half (vv.1-12), with its references to 'us', i.e. to the people of God as a whole, and to 'all the earth,' and its recounting of God's 'awesome deeds' for Israel (v.6 describes the exodus and the crossing of the Jordan) – sets God's deeds for the particular person into the context of his commitment to the people as a whole; indeed, to mankind as a whole, for whose sake the people exist.

The biblical worldview does not require a choice between corporate and particular: rather, the particular person experiences God's love as a member of his people. Psalms 66-67 represent a break in the pattern of Davidic authorship that began in Psalm 51; Psalms 68-70 resume the pattern. At the same time, there are connections between Psalms 65 and 66, such as the mention of vows and sacrifices; compare Psalm 65:1-4 with vv.13-15 here.

Psalm 67 - To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.

This psalm, like Psalm 65, seems to be a thanksgiving for a fruitful harvest. Unlike Psalm 65, it is not really a thanksgiving hymn; it is rather a prayer that God will bless his people Israel so that the rest of the world may come to know the true God. Verses 3 and 5 of Psalm 67 are the same, marking the ends of their stanzas; they summarise the desire of this psalm: <<**Let all the peoples praise you!**>> Singing this helps Israel to keep its own calling in view: their blessing is not simply for themselves but for the Gentiles too. Each Israelite is a player in a grand story that stretches far beyond the boundaries of his own life, or even of his own land.

This psalm has a heart to see God's way, God's salvation, and God's praise extended all through the earth.

Psalm 68 - To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. A Song.

This is a hymn by which God's people celebrate his continued care and protection for Israel, remembering how God led them through the wilderness into their inheritance, and daily bears his people up (v.19). The celebration does not stop with Israel, however: it recognises that defeating Gentile kingdoms 'who delight in war' is for the sake of all the Gentiles coming to worship the true God.

It is possible that David composed this psalm to commemorate the moving of the ark into the tabernacle (2 Samuel 6:12-15): v.1 echoes Numbers 10:35 (Moses' words when the ark set out); v.16 mentions the mountain of God's abode; vv.24-25 describe God's procession; and v.17 and v.35 speak of the sanctuary. In any event the overall theme of the psalm is God's residence in Zion and his care for his people.

Psalm 69 - To the leader: according to Lilies. Of David.

This is an individual lament, geared especially to a situation in which a faithful Israelite is suffering for wrongs he has done (v.5) but also finds attackers piling on, taking advantage of his suffering and making it worse (v.26). The NT cites several passages from this psalm, applying them to the life of Christ. Some have argued that NT use shows that the right way to read the psalm is as David's personal prayer, which believers sing in order to identify with him. A better approach comes from remembering that David was the representative for the people of God, and in that role he wrote this as a prayer that is well-suited to each of God's people in analogous situations, providing the ideal response to such trials, refer to the comment made on Psalm 3, where the issues are similar; the notes will show how this sheds light on the NT writers' portrait of Jesus.

Psalm 70 - To the leader. Of David, for the memorial offering.

This short psalm is an individual lament, an urgent prayer for rescue from gloating enemies. The whole psalm is very close to Psalm 40:14-16. The title specifies the psalm as 'for the memorial offering'.

Psalm 71

This is another individual lament, suited to a faithful person in danger from enemies who would cause hurt by taking advantage of any weakness or distress. These enemies could be foreign, and they could be Israelite; the wording is general enough to apply to either. It would appear that the author of Psalm 71 composed it using material from earlier psalms, albeit with variations. The exposition here discerns the stanza structure of the psalm by following the vocatives, 'O God' or 'O Lord.'

Many commentators believe this is a psalm of David, and is his prayer and trust in God in his latter years under the crisis of Absalom's rebellion. Since the title or text of the psalm does not say this, there should be no speculation and Psalm 71 should be treated as if it were so, and instead regard it as an anonymous composition.

Psalm 72 - Of Solomon.

The last psalm of Book 2 is a royal psalm, praying that the heirs of David's line, beginning with Solomon, might have success in the task that God has assigned the king: namely, ruling God's people well, protecting the poor and needy, and bringing blessing to all nations of the earth. Like Psalm 2, this song looks forward to a worldwide rule that embraces in full what the Messiah will accomplish: the OT anticipates the ultimate heir of David, who will take the throne and bring the light of God to all nations, as confirmed by Isaiah 2:1-5 and 11:1-10, and the NT is careful to explain that Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, has begun to fulfil this task through the Christian mission (Matthew 28:18-20 and Romans 1:1-6). Therefore Christian hymns based on this psalm, such as 'Jesus Shall Reign' and 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed,' have used the song according to its proper meaning. This also explains why Christian witness, when it is true to the messianic picture of the Bible, goes beyond basic Gospel proclamation and also fosters social justice and the moral transformation of whole societies.

The title, 'of Solomon,' can mean that Solomon was the author, just as 'of David' normally means that David wrote the psalm. On the other hand, it could mean that someone, perhaps David, spoke these words about Solomon, setting out the goal for his reign and for the reigns of his heirs.