

# PSALMS

## Chapter 63

**O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup>So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. <sup>3</sup>Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. <sup>4</sup>So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. <sup>5</sup>My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, <sup>6</sup>when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; <sup>7</sup>for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. <sup>8</sup>My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. <sup>9</sup>But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; <sup>10</sup>they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. <sup>11</sup>But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.**

**Ps 63** A confession of longing for God and for the security his presence offers when deadly enemies threaten. That longing is vividly described by the metaphor of thirst (v. 1) and hunger (v. 5; see 42:1–2). Like Ps 62 this psalm is an implicit prayer. It is linked to that psalm also by the advancement from hearing (62:11) to seeing (v. 2; see 48:8 and note). The imagery of the night of danger (v. 6) and the morning of salvation (see note on v. 1) once more occurs. This psalm was prescribed for daily public prayers of the early church. In its structure, the initial expression of longing (v. 1) gives way at the end to the expectation of joy (v. 11)—the literary frame of the psalm. What he has seen in the sanctuary (v. 2) he remembers on his bed at night (v. 6), and that reassures him that his enemies will suffer the end they plot for him (vv. 9–10). (CSB)

Psalm reflecting David’s faith in the Lord and his willing submission to God’s plans. Most likely, the psalm refers to David’s flight from Absalom into the wilderness of Judea (2Sm 15–17), a time when the king fled Jerusalem and left his fate in the Lord’s hands (2Sm 15:24–26). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, longing for God; vv 5–8, contentment with God; vv 9–11, God will defeat the king’s enemies. (TLSB)

Like Psalm 61, this psalm suggests a time of exile. In this respect it is also similar to Psalms 41–43. Perhaps it was written as a reflection on David’s flight through the wilderness of Judah when he had to escape Absalom. (PBC)

**63 title** *When*. If this tradition is correct, the reference is probably to 2Sa 15:23–28; 16:2, 14; 17:16, 29 since the psalmist is referred to as king (see v. 11). (CSB)

**63:1** *my God* – Even in the wilderness and on the run, David expresses his faith and trust in God. (TLSB)

David expresses a longing for God and his temple. His prayer is the prayer of an intimate friend of God. His eagerness is that of a lover, longing to be reunited with the one he loves. (PBC)

*earnestly*. Lit. “at dawn,” “in the morning.” (CSB)

*my soul ... my flesh*. I, with my whole being. (CSB)

*dry and weary land.* A metaphor for his situation of need, in which he does not taste “the richest of foods” (v. 5) supplied by the “river whose streams make glad the city of God.” (CSB)

Either the arid place where David has taken refuge, or figurative for the difficult times in life when God seems far off. Luther: “With our own concerns and thoughts we torture ourselves and stew over trying to pull this off our neck and to get rid of it. There is an evil and clever devil riding me and other people and frequently playing these tricks on me in my temptation or anxiety, whether it has to do with spiritual or with secular affairs. He immediately butts in and makes you start stewing over it. In this way he snatches us from our prayer and makes us so dizzy that we do not even think of praying.... We should develop the habit, whenever we see anguish or need, to fall on our knees immediately and to spread the need before God, on the basis of this admonition and promise” (AE 21:232). (TLSB)

**63:2–5** Comforting reflection on what he had seen in the sanctuary; it awakens joyful expectations. (CSB)

Praising God is David’s food and drink. Earlier he was thirsty, now he is satisfied. Meditation and praise nourish his life. (PBC)

**63:2** *sanctuary* – David has the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant in mind, the “embassy” of heaven on earth. (TLSB)

He is eager to be restored from exile so that he can worship in God’s presence. (PBC)

*beholding your power and glory* – God’s presence, perhaps similar to Isaiah’s vision at his call to prophetic office in Is 6. (TLSB)

The particular objectives in mind were: to become aware of God’s power to help and the glory that is manifested whenever such help is experienced. (Leupold)

What he now longs for in the wilderness is what he witnessed in the past, to see the evidence of God’s powerful and glorious presence. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**63:3** Though life is commonly regarded as being almost our chief treasure it is far surpassed by the realization of how great God’s faithfulness in his dealings with his children actually is. (Leupold)

*steadfast love* – Verse 3 expresses the central theological idea of the Psalm: “your loyal love (Ps. 23:6) is better than life.” Life with all its benefits as well as troubles, changes; but God’s faithful love does not. His loyal love can provide covenant blessings for his people; and it can change the trials of life so that by means of them life is enriched. And God’s loyal love lasts forever (cf. Ps. 118:1). (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*better than life* – God’s love is precious on earth but leads to eternal life (cf 23:6). (TLSB)

**63:4** *lift up my hands.* In praise. (CSB)

Common posture of prayer was standing, with face raised to the heavens, arms held out and up with palms upward. (TLSB)

Praise will be in his mind on his lips day and night. He will rest in the shadow of God's wings. (PBC)

The praise with its accompanying symbolic gesture will be "in your name" (s.v. Ps. 20:1). The prepositional phrase means that he will praise God on the basis of what God reveals himself to be in his powerful and glorious acts. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**63:5** *will be satisfied* – Metaphor for calm heart and quiet soul of a believer even in times of trouble and danger. (TLSB)

*the richest of foods.* Lit. "marrow and fat." (CSB)

The most flavorful and therefore the best, which David left behind at his palace (cf 2Sm 15:13–16). God is not stingy when He gives His gifts. (TLSB)

**63:6–8** Night reflections, remembering what he had seen "in the sanctuary" (v. 2). (CSB)

**63:6** *when I remember you* – Remembering God would mean remembering the things that God has said and done. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*On my bed.* At night as he expectantly awaits the dawning of the morning of deliverance. (CSB)

*I will meditate on you* – Hbr *hagah*, "ponder" by speaking to oneself. To remember God's gracious saving acts and apply the lessons of the past to the present situation. (TLSB)

*watches of the night* – The Hebrews divided the night into three watches. The Jews had only three watches during the night: (1) sunset–10:00 P.M., (2) 10:00 P.M.–2:00 A.M. and (3) 2:00 A.M.–sunrise). The "beginning of the middle watch" would be after the enemy had gone to sleep.). (CSB)

The night was divided into several watches, segments of three or four hours, for sentry duty. (TLSB)

**63:7** *you have been my help* – God does for him what he cannot do for himself – God is the helper *par excellence!* Without divine help the psalmist would be left to wither away in the dry desert. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*shadow of your wings* – Metaphor for the protective outreach of God's power. (CSB)

He will rest in the shadow of God's wings. (PBC)

He is continually walking about under the protection of God's sheltering wings, and that thought fills the very soul with exaltation. (Leupold)

*I will sing for joy* – Under this kind of care and protection he will surely sing joyfully. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**63:8** *clings to you* – The verb "clings" means "to cling to, stick to" as if glued to something. The sentence expresses his loyalty to God: in all his distress and deprivation in life, he still holds fast to God. (A Commentary of the Psalms – Ross)

*right hand* – God’s right hand (signifying power) holds him fast. God’s “right” is exalted (Ps. 89:13); it does marvelously (Ps. 118:15), bringing salvation (Ps. 98:1) and providing sustained protection (Deut. 33:27). Here God’s power preserves the psalmist’s relationship with the living God. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**63:9–10** His enemies will get what they deserve; in seeking his life they forfeit their own (see Ge 9:5; Ex 21:23; Dt 19:21). (CSB)

**63:9** *those* – Probably Absalom’s fellow conspirators. (TLSB)

By seeking my life they bring destruction on themselves. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*depths of the earth* – Here, the netherworld or grave. (CSB)

**63:10** *portion for jackals*. Like bodies of enemies left unburied on the battlefield to add to their disgrace. (CSB)

Doglike scavengers. (TLSB)

The gruesome picture of scavengers feeding on their bodies is only a pale foreshadowing of the grim reality of hell. (PBC)

**63:11** *who swear by him* – Those who revere and trust God (see Dt 6:13). (CSB)

Such oath-taking served as a confession of faith and an acknowledgment of the Lord as the one true God. (TLSB)

*mouths of liars*. Those who live by falsehood. (CSB)

Those who clamor against God will be silenced, but the mouths of God’s people will praise him eternally. (PBC)

On the run, cut off from God’s tabernacle and the capital city, Jerusalem, David turns to God in prayer and praise for His love and salvation. When we are in the “wilderness” and God seems distant, we may find ourselves tempted to focus on our troubles rather than turning to God in faith and confidence. David shows us the way to handle disaster and doubt: meditate on the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving (cf Php 4:4–7). Faith looks beyond the circumstances to the cross of Christ and sees God’s love, holding fast to His promises to His children. • “My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me” (v 8). Amen. (TLSB)