

PSALMS

Chapter 50

The Mighty One, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. ² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. ³ Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest. ⁴ He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: ⁵ “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” ⁶ The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! *Selah* ⁷ “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. ⁸ Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. ⁹ I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. ¹² “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. ¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” ¹⁶ But to the wicked God says: “What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷ For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. ¹⁸ If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. ¹⁹ “You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit ²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. ²¹ These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. ²² “Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! ²³ The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”

Ps 50 The Lord calls his covenant people to account as they meet before him in worship at the temple. (Thus the psalm has links with Ps 46–49. The psalm appears to have been composed for a temple liturgy in which Israel reaffirms her commitment to God’s covenant. A leader of the Levitical choir addresses Israel on behalf of the Lord (see Ps 15; 24, either of which may have been spoken earlier in the same liturgy). This liturgy was possibly related to the Feast of Tabernacles. The rebuke of a false understanding of sacrifice the psalm has affinity with the prophecies of Amos, Micah and Isaiah and so may date from the late eighth and/or early seventh centuries B.C. Others find a closer relationship with the reformation of Josiah (2Ki 22:1–23:25) and the ministry of Jeremiah. Structurally, the psalm has three parts: (1) the announcement of the “coming” of Israel’s covenant Lord to call his people to account (vv. 1–6); (2) the Lord’s words of correction for those of honest intent (vv. 7–15); (3) his sharp rebuke of “the wicked” among them (vv. 16–23). (CSB)

This Asaph psalm is separated from the rest of the Asaph psalms (73–83) that begin Book Three of the Psalter. God speaks in the first person (vv 5, 7–15, 16b–23). Note the piling up of divine names from the beginning: v 1, “The Mighty One” (‘*El*), “God” (‘*elohim*), “the LORD” (*yahweh*), a combination found elsewhere only in Jsh 22:22; v 6 “judge”; v 14, “Most High”; v 21, “I Am” “God” (rare Hbr word ‘*eloah*). The divine judge is calling His people to account! *Asaph*. One of the Levites appointed by David to provide music for the temple services (1Ch 15:16–24; 25:1; 2Ch 29:30). The psalm gives an almost visionary scene that depicts a past, present, and future theophany (see p 39). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–6, God the Lord comes to judge; vv 7–11, all belongs to Him; vv 12–15, God wants thanksgiving, fulfilled vows, and prayer; vv 16–18, neglect of God’s Word; vv 19–21, evil speech; vv 22–23, God’s threat and promise. (TLSB)

50 title A traditional ascription of the psalm to Asaph; or it may mean “for Asaph” (see “For Jeduthun” in Ps 39 title) or for the descendants of Asaph who functioned in his place. This psalm may have been separated from the other psalms of Asaph (73–83) because of its thematic links with Ps 46–49. Asaph was one of David’s three choir leaders. (CSB)

50:1–6 The Lord comes (v. 3) in the temple worship to correct and rebuke his people: Israel must know that the God of Zion is the God of Sinai (see Ex 19:16–20). (CSB)

These verses summon the people of Israel to appear before God to be judged for their spiritual indifference and self-centered worship. God’s condemnation of formalistic worship includes all the worship of the heathen because their worship was based on self-interest rather than on love of God. However, Israel’s guilt was even greater than that of the heathen because Israel had greater knowledge of God and because they had made a covenant to serve the Lord. The form of God’s summons to Israel is very effective because in the first three verses its sounds as if the heathen are being summoned to Mount Zion to be judged. The complacent among Israel must have smiled at the thought. Suddenly in verse 4 it becomes clear that Israel is the main target of judgment. What a jolt this sudden turn must have been to the hearers. (PBC)

50:1 The psalm begins with a forceful announcement that God has convened this judgment: it piles up titles for the divine judge in order to impress on the reader the seriousness of the occasion. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

The Mighty One, God, the LORD – A sequence found elsewhere only in Jos 22:22. The repetition of the sacred names gives an oath-like quality to this strong denial of any wrongdoing.). Ps 50 is noteworthy for its use of numerous names and titles for God (seven in all: three in v. 1, four in the rest of the psalm. (CSB)

The first three words of the Hebrew text emphasize that it is God who has spoken: El (= God), “Elohim” (= God), “Yahweh” (= Lord). The Creator-God (= “Elohim”) and the Redeemer-God (= Yahweh) are one God (= El). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

The summons comes from the highest authority, the judge of the whole earth. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

the earth – See “the heavens ... the earth” (v. 4) and “the heavens” (v. 6). When Moses renewed the covenant between the Lord and Israel on the plains of Moab, he called upon heaven and earth to serve as third-party witnesses to the covenant (Dt 30:19; 31:28). The Lord now summons these to testify that his present word to his people is in complete accord with that covenant (see Isa 1:2). (CSB)

Israel’s Lord, the covenant God, has a grievous complaint to make against His unfaithful people. But the whole world will hear it. (TLSB)

Rising of the sun...setting – The place of the sunrise, the east, and the place of its setting, the west, to mean everyone from east to west. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

All people are to be listeners. (Leupold)

50:2 *perfection of beauty* – Because God resides there (cf. Eze 27:3–4, 11; 28:12). (CSB)

Everything in the sanctuary had to be appropriate for the Lord of glory – but was made magnificent by his presence. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

shines forth – Manifests his glory as he comes to act (see 80:1; 94:1; Dt 33:2; cf. Eze 28:7, 17), now confronting his people, but not yet announcing judgment as in Isa 1 or Mic 1. (CSB)

The light of his presence in this sense uncovers sin. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Manifests His glory in both power and mercy. (TLSB)

50:3 *comes* – From his enthronement between the cherubim (see 80:1; 99:1; see also 1Sa 4:4; 2Sa 6:2; 2Ki 19:15) in the Most Holy Place of the temple – The inner sanctuary of the temple (see 1Ki 6:5), where the ark of the covenant stood (see 1Ki 8:6–8); it was God’s throne room on earth.; see also Isa 26:21; Mic 1:3). (CSB)

He is present at the temple as on Sinai. (TLSB)

does not keep silent – No longer (see v. 21) will he let their sins go unrebuked. (CSB)

What he says will convict the sinful people and hopefully correct them. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

mighty tempest – Recalls Mount Sinai, where God first delivered His covenant to the frightened nation (Ex 19:18, 20; 20:18–19). (TLSB)

These descriptions frequently accompany a judgment scene (as they do in the prophetic predictions of the great day of the Lord, beginning with the second coming. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:4 *He calls to the heavens above...and to the earth* – God issues a subpoena for all creation to appear as witnesses when He judges His people (cf Dt 31:28; 32:1; 1Pt 4:17). (TLSB)

It means that what is said will be true and confirmed by all, that no one can dispute the charges God makes. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

judge – Call them to account in accordance with his covenant. (CSB)

God does the judging. The people serve as witnesses of the solemn transaction. (Leupold)

50:5 *faithful ones* – It is one of several Hebrew words for God’s people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him. (CSB)

They are the saints, or more precisely, those beloved by God. The word “my saints” has been variously translated: it is related to the word “loyal love” (s.v. Ps. 23:6) which is a covenant word. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Covenant – Israel stands in a special relationship to God by virtue of the first sacrifices (Ex 24:5–8; cf Gn 15:9–18), which the covenant worship forms kept in effect. (TLSB)

by sacrifice. † Sacrifices were a part of the ritual that sealed the covenant (see Ex 24:4–8) and continued to be an integral part of Israel’s expression of covenant commitment to the Lord, and of his to them. (CSB)

They are “cutters of my covenant by sacrifice” (people who made a covenant with God by sacrifice, that is, believers – the pious or faithful). So the defendants are the righteous people who are in covenant with God. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:6 *heavens* – The “heavens” must be interpreted as a figure for what is in the heavens in light of the summons of witnesses from heaven and earth in the preceding verses. There will be no question about the verdict – everyone, everything, will attest to its righteousness. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Bearing witness to His righteousness. (TLSB)

righteousness – Very often the “righteousness” of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. (CSB)

judge – Lord over his people (the Hebrew for “judge” and that for “king” are sometimes used synonymously; see, e.g., Isa 33:22). “Judge” occurs as a title for God in, e.g., 94:2; Ge 18:25; Jdg 11:27. (CSB)

God alone is just and the judge, whether this visionary scene takes place in the past, present, or on the Last Day (TLSB)

The focus is on this righteous judge, for the wording of the text states that the heavens declare “his” righteousness; it is the character of the divine judge that guarantees the justice of the case. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

50:7–15 The Lord corrects his people. (CSB)

Two major problems were apparent. The people of Israel were setting aside the first table of the law. Many in Israel thought they were doing God a favor with their offerings, imagining that he had need of their services. The second wrong attitude on the part of many worshipers in Israel was ignoring the second table of the law. Many in Israel offered sacrifices for their sins, even though they fully intended to continue with the same sins. (PBC)

50:7 *hear O my people* – “Our God” (v. 3) and “your God” (here) reflect the covenant bond. (CSB)

What makes the sin the more reprehensible is the fact that they are God’s own people. Therefore, to whom much is given, of him much shall be required. (Leupold)

The prominence of “hear” (s.v. Ps. 45:10) commands their attention; it is a command for a response to what he will say, not merely an audience. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

testify against you – God acts as prosecuting attorney as well as judge. There will be no rebuttal witnesses against His truth. (TLSB)

I am God, your God – See Ex 19:3–6; Lev 19:2–4, 10, 25, 31, 34, 36; 20:7, 24; 22:33; 23:22. (CSB)

If they had any doubt that the speaker was one to whom they should respond, that is removed quickly: “I am God. your God” (literally, “God, your God [am] I”). He is God. That alone demands attention. But he is their God. That would remind them of their covenant responsibilities. So once again the point is made clear: these are believers who are being charged, worshipers. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:8–13 Israel had not failed to bring enough sacrifices (v. 8), but she was ever tempted to think that sacrifices were of first importance to God, as though he was dependent on them. This notion was widespread among Israel’s pagan neighbors. (More important is obedience (see 1Sa 15:22), especially to God’s moral law, i.e, the ten basic commandments of his covenant.). (CSB)

50:8-9 God’s Law and sacrifices are not obsolete, but God’s people are perverting the purpose of sacrifices and burnt offerings if they think they can put God under obligation to them by giving Him what He already owns (vv 7–11). Sacrifices are not magic, automatically bending God to grant wishes. (TLSB)

50:8 *burnt offerings are continually before me* – This kind of sacrifice typified total self-surrender. But it was just this feature of the sacrifice that was lacking. (Leupold)

Daily temple services are done by rote, suggesting that God depends on such works. “Such passages do not condemn works, which God certainly had commanded as outward exercises in this government. They condemn the godless opinion that people thought, that by their works they appeased God’s wrath, and so cast away faith” (Ap V 86). (TLSB)

50:9 *not accept a bull...or goats* – It is not the animal that God wanted, but them. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:10 *every beast* – Nothing that already belongs to our Creator can be “given” to Him! Right sacrifice is trust that acknowledges our need for His deliverance (vv 14–15). (TLSB)

He owns the animals in the forest, the cattle on the thousand hills, the birds in the hills and creatures of the field. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Thousand hills – Used here figuratively for a very large number. (CSB)

The people were bringing sacrifices to God because they thought God needed them. But the sacrifices never meant that they were feeding God! That was a pagan mentality. In the ancient world sacrifices and offerings were brought to the temples to feed the gods, because the gods were like humans, and their hunger and thirst had to be satisfied. If their hunger was satisfied, the pagans believed, then the gods would meet their needs. But the Bible made it very clear that God is a spirit and not human. Any language that described him with human qualities was purely figurative; and that language never portrayed him as having the baser human needs and instincts. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:12 *hungry* – Priests received food portions from the temple sacrifices, but God does not hunger. (TLSB)

The whole sentence is a rhetorical question to affirm that he does not do this. He is God. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:13-14 Slain animals are an insult to God unless the sacrifice is offered to Him in humble recognition of total dependence on His unearned mercy (cf Lv 7:12–13). (TLSB)

The wording of these verses implies that they were thinking that God needed their offerings. But that is the opposite of what they were supposed to be thinking. They were to bring sacrifices to God as tokens of their dependence on him – they were to bring sacrifices to God because they needed him. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:14–15 God wants Israel to acknowledge her dependence on him, by giving thank offerings for his mercies (v. 14) and by praying to him in times of need (v. 15; see 116:17–19). Those who do so may expect God’s gracious answer to their prayers (stated more directly in v. 23). God also desires obedience to his moral law. (CSB)

50:14 *sacrifice of thanksgiving* – True thanksgiving is a truly spiritual matter. It is worship on a higher level. When a man can thank and praise he has learned the lesson as to what true worship is. (Leupold)

When people received a blessing or an answer to prayer from God, they were to go to the sanctuary with a sacrifice to be offered as a peace offering, celebrating the fact that they were at peace with God. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Most High – That is, God Most High (see 57:2). (CSB)

your vows – Vows that accompanied prayer in times of need, usually involving thank offerings (see 66:13–15), always involving praise of the Lord for his answer to prayer. See also Heb 13:15. (CSB)

Payment of vows (Lv 7:16) likewise is a sign of gratitude to God for answering prayer. (TLSB)

A study of the lament psalms will reveal that during their prayers the people often vowed the praise they would offer once God answered their prayers. Thus, if God wanted that said, he would have to answer the prayer. This was not seen as crass bargaining, but confident faith in the cycle of prayer and praise. Once God answered the prayer, then the worshiper was by oath bound to fulfill the vow – the praise had to be declared in the sanctuary, and that meant it also had to follow the ritual of the sacrifice of praise (see Ps. 66:13-16). So it was not simply praising that

would correct their worship; it had to be this kind of praise that came from a living faith. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:15 *call upon Me* – All our acts of worship and our entire lives are now offered to and accepted by God through His Son, the personal Savior whom we call upon in times of trouble, and who, without condition, promises to deliver us (cf Heb 13:15). (TLSB)

glorify me With praise in the fulfillment of the vows (see v. 23)—and, implicitly, with obedience to his covenant law (see following verses). (CSB)

Glorifying is never our work, but calling upon God and receiving His deliverance in thanksgiving (faith!) is the worship that glorifies Him. “God wants Himself to be known, He wants Himself to be worshiped, so that we receive benefits from Him and receive them because of His mercy, not because of our merits” (Ap IV 60; see XXIV 29). (TLSB)

It should be a source of great comfort to God’ people that their pleas for help during difficult times are valued very highly by our Lord. To encourage God’s people to pray freely in evil days, God adds a divine promise: “I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” So one act of true devotion (calling on him) produces an act of deliverance, and that, in turn, leads to glorification of the Deliverer; and thus a kind of godly chain reaction has set in. (Leupold)

When faithful Israelites offered praise to God, genuine praise, it indicated that they were trusting God and he was meeting their needs. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:16–23 The Lord’s rebuke of the wicked. (CSB)

50:16 *the wicked* – The address now comes to “the ungodly” (Ps. 1:1), often translated “the wicked,” people who in God’s sight were guilty of sin because they were not forgiven. Here they were participants in the worship. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

recite my laws. Apparently a part of the liturgy of covenant commitment. (CSB)

God shifts from addressing the mindlessly religious (vv 7–15) to the outright “wicked” of Israel (vv 16–21). They could rattle off the statutes and the covenant as at the reading of the Law (Dt 31:10–13) or during covenant renewal (2Ki 23:1–3). Public allegiance hides private evil. (TLSB)

50:17 *You hate discipline* – They formally participate in the holy ritual but reject God’s law as the rule for life outside the ritual. (CSB)

Ignoring God’s covenant and the instruction of His Word. (TLSB)

The verb “you hate” (Ps. 139:2) has the connotation of rejecting something along with a feeling of disliking or loathing it – they reject God’s instruction in his word (even though they no doubt claimed to believe it. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

cast My words behind you – Defying God as described in vv 18–20. (TLSB)

Casting the instruction behind their back, meant discarding it and turning away from it. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:18 *thief ... adulterers* – Tertullian: “It is not enough that we do no such things ourselves, unless we break all connection also with those who do” (*ANF* 3:86). Cf Rm 1:32; 2:21–24. (TLSB)

They may not have initiated the thievery, but they were comfortable participating in some way, perhaps in a way that they could rationalize. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

With adulterers – Their lot was with adulterers, that is, they participated with them because they were comfortable with them. And somehow they were still able to participate in worship. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:19 *give your mouth free reign* – The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword. (CSB)

They were treacherous and destructive in what they said. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Lies and slander are condemned in the Eighth Commandment. (TLSB)

Frames deceit – The verb “frame” is actually “weave,” a figure that indicates they were fabricating the deceit, they were weaving a web of deceit. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:20 *your own mother’s son* – Slander of the closest blood relative was considered the most heartless kind of betrayal. (TLSB)

There was no love or care for their brothers; they opposed them and tried to destroy them with their words. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

50:21 *I have been silent* – God’s merciful and patient “silence” is distorted by the wicked into bad and self-serving theology (see Ecc 8:11; Isa 42:14; 57:11). – Because God’s judgment did not come immediately, the complacent in Israel thought they were dealing with God successfully and that he condoned or at least tolerated their lifeless, formalistic worship. (CSB)

God is not deaf, dumb, and blind to wickedness. He patiently awaits our repentance! Cf Rm 2:3–4. (TLSB)

They apparently had convinced themselves that God was not angry with them because he had not with God’s permission. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

one like yourself – They show their contempt for God by viewing Him as tolerant of evil like themselves. (TLSB)

I rebuke you – Set forth the particulars of my indictment before your eyes. (CSB)

Israel was complacent, but judgment for Israel was looming just over the horizon. God was giving them time for repentance. (PBC)

The sin which he thought he could hide from God, or which, with strange infatuation, he supposed God too no notice of, shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

Too often God's silence is taken as his approval (cf. Mal. 2:17; 3:14-15). The people became used to God's patience and mistook it for an inability to do anything about the evil on earth. They did not understand that Yahweh is the Wholly Other One, who is free in his judgment as well as in his grace. He cannot be boxed in by human beings. In his own time, God will come to rebuke and then to judge his people openly. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

50:22 *forget* – It means they did not act on what they knew, i.e., they did not give God his proper due (s.v. Ps. 103:2). Moses' sermon in Deut. 8 explains how people would act if they forgot God: they would become proud, take credit for their successes, and fail to obey God or give him the glory. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

God. A relatively rare word for “God” (Hebrew *Eloah*), though common in Job. (CSB)

Tear you apart – The verb “tear in pieces” is a word used of animals and their prey. The warning here may not be for the whole nation, only a segment of the congregation. God would purge the hypocrites from the worshipping community. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

None to deliver – There would be no one to deliver people from his judgment. Only God can deliver people from his judgment, and so he instructs them to change. (A Commentary on Psalms – Ross)

God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner who is perishing in his sins. So he admonishes him betimes. (Leupold)

The grace of God is manifest in his patience. Though his people have had and will continue to have problems - sometimes very serious problems – he is still patient with them. The Word of God invites his people to repent and devote themselves once more to a life of godliness. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

50:23 *one who offers thanksgiving* – True sacrifices, offered in faith and thankfulness would please and honor God. This psalm has many obvious applications to our stewardship and worship. We should beware of giving our offerings to certain needs with the feeling that God needs us to do his work. God did not need Israel's offerings, and he obviously doesn't need ours either. God invites us to join in the work of missions, not because he needs us, but to give us the privilege of working with him. (PBC)

orders his way – Shows the fruit of faith. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “When your breasts are beaten with penitent hands, and your pavements worn with your knees, your altars heaped with vows and devout prayers, your cheeks furrowed with tears; when groan and sighs resound on all sides and the sacred roofs echo with spiritual songs instead of worldly pleadings, there is nothing which the citizens of heaven more love to look upon, nothing is more agreeable to the eyes of the Heavenly King” (*SLSB*, p 77). (TLSB)

salvation – Luther: “The last verse teaches us that to call upon God in distress and thank Him is the true worship, the most pleasing offering, and the right way to salvation” (*PIML*, p 68). (TLSB)

Ps 50 God comes as a judge to reprimand His people for the unbelief that hides behind careless ritualism and hypocritical religiosity. We mask our sin by hiding behind false piety, or merely “going through the motions” of Christian worship (confessing, hearing, communing), ignoring the

deadly seriousness of sin. Sin is not magically waved away; true repentance turns away from sin as the horror and poison that it is, and clings to the perfect, once for all sacrifice of God's Son dying on the cross. • O Lord, we receive Jesus and all the benefits of His sacrifice in Word and Sacrament. We praise and glorify You for this great salvation! Amen. (TLSB)