

Exegesis of Psalm 63

Introduction

Unfortunately in our day, age, and country, worship of God is seldom pursued by Christians with spiritual fervor and intensity. We have synthesized our thinking with that of the culture around us and have become so accustomed to comfort and safety that our spiritual walks are marked by indifference and apathy. Should it take a crisis for an American believer to intensely seek after God? Should passion be found only in the new convert who has recently been snatched from the fire? It is easy for Christians, especially in this country, to become complacent about faith and to take things for granted. As we do, over time, our zeal and passion for God begins to wane. We need to be constantly reinvigorated. American Christians need a wakeup call! We need to be reminded of the meaning of true, passionate intimacy with God and confronted with an example of genuine, heart-felt, fervent worship. I can think of no better passage in the Bible to address this than Psalm 63. In this psalm, worship of God is depicted as passionate, transparent, genuine, and urgent. The psalmist (David) demonstrates the posture of his heart to be earnestly seeking God, thirsting and yearning for Him.

This psalm is unique in that it allows believers to peer in on a very intimate time of worship in the life of David. “It is a song of the most delicate form and deepest spiritual contents.”¹ It expresses praise, adoration, concern, trust, contentment, thanksgiving, confidence, and hope in a way that demonstrates worship as a passionate, yet meaningful expression of humble dependence on a real and living God, Who is ever present and near to those He loves. “It is remarkable that in this Psalm...there is no petition. There is gladness, there is praise, there is the most exalted communion with God, there is longing for His Presence as the highest of all blessings; but there is not one word of asking for temporal, or even for spiritual good.”²

Redemptive-Historical Analysis

According to the title of the Psalm, which is found in verse 1, this psalm is a **לְדָוִד** (Psalm of David) which was written by David **בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ בְּמִדְבַּר יְהוּדָה** (while he was in the wilderness of Judea). On the basis of the historical writings, we find three candidate possibilities of when David was in the wilderness of Judea. The first is 1 Samuel 23:14-23, which depicts his flight from Saul. Here, “*David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh*” (v.15). Ziph was a city in the Maon district of Judah about six kilometers southeast of Hebron. The barren desert wilderness in which David hid surrounded the city.³ The second is found in 1 Samuel 23:24-25. Here, “*David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon*” (v.24). According to Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Maon is “a city in the mountain country of Judah,” and the wilderness of Maon is “east of Maon and west of the Dead Sea.”⁴ The third is found in 2 Samuel 15:23ff, which depicts David’s flight from Absalom. Here, **וְהַמֶּלֶךְ עָבַר בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן** (the king [i.e. David] also passed over the brook Kidron). Kidron was a valley on the eastern slope of Jerusalem.⁵

¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Psalms,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume V*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 213.

² J.J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1989), 487.

³ R.F. Youngblood, F.F. Bruce, R.K. Harrison, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The third option is likely the best candidate. In this passage, David is repeatedly referred to as **הַמֶּלֶךְ** (the king) whereas Saul is referred to as **הַמֶּלֶךְ** in 1 Samuel 23:20. However, in Psalm 63:12, David, referring to himself, says **וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יִשְׂמַח בַּאֱלֹהִים** (but the king will rejoice in God). This rejoicing is in contrast to his adversaries, who will be **עַל־יְדֵי־חֶרֶב** (they will be poured out on the hands of the sword) and **מִנַּת שָׁעָלִים יִהְיוּ** (they will be a portion of the foxes). H.C. Leupold agrees that the psalm “may well be said to reflect David’s experience when he fled before his son Absalom.”⁶ Most conservative commentators agree.

The plot of 2 Samuel 15:23 begins to build in 2 Samuel 12:24 with the birth of Solomon, who will be the future king. The text here in 12:25 says that **וַיְהוָה אֲהָבוֹ** (the LORD loved him [Solomon]). The implication is that God loved and chose him from birth. Verses 26-31 contain an account of the capture of Rabbah by David and Joab. 13:1 begins with the words **אַחֲרֵי־כֵן** (it came about after this). This time marker serves as a point of historical reference for the account of Amnon’s rape of Tamar that follows (13:1-22). This is followed by Absalom’s murder of Amnon (13:23-33), which involved Absalom deceiving his father David. After the murder, Absalom fled to Geshur for three years (13:34-39). Chapter 14:1-24 describes Absalom’s return to Jerusalem, followed by his appearance before his father, the king (vv.25-33). 15:1 contains another time marker **כֵּן וַיְהִי מֵאַחֲרַי** (it came about after this). This is given to indicate the beginning of the treason of Absalom. First, he gathered chariots, horses, and men to himself (15:2). Then, he devised a plot to **וַיִּגְנַב אֶבְשָׁלוֹם אֶת־לֵב אֲנָשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל** (steal the hearts of the men of Israel) away from David the king (vv.2-6). After four years of this, Absalom went to Hebron (vv.7-9). Shortly thereafter (v.11), Absalom told his followers **וַאֲמַרְתֶּם מֶלֶךְ אֲבִשָׁלוֹם בְּחֶבְרוֹן** (you shall say, “Absalom is king in Hebron”). What began with two hundred men (v.11) quickly grew **וַיְהִי הַקָּשֶׁר אֲמִץ וְהָעָם הוֹלֵךְ וְרַב אֶת־אֲבִשָׁלוֹם** (and the conspiracy was strong and the people were greatly increasing, v.12). When David was told that the hearts of the men of Israel were with Absalom (v.13), he and six hundred of his men fled (vv.14ff). The king and his people crossed over the Brook Kidron **וַאֲתֵּרְדוּ אֶת־הַמַּדְבָּר** (toward the way of the wilderness, v.15). We can see David’s concern for his life in the words **וַנִּבְרָחָה כִּי לֹא־תִהְיֶה־לָּנוּ פְּלִיטָה מִפְּנֵי אֲבִשָׁלוֹם** (arise and let us flee or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom, v.14).

Regarding date and authorship, it is clear that David is the author of Psalm 63. The psalm begins with **לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר** (a psalm of David). Some scholars have argued that the **לְ** preposition typically means “to” or “toward,” and therefore we should translate this as “a psalm to David.” In this sense, it would simply be a psalm dedicated to David. Instead of being by David and from David, it is only related to David in the sense that the author, who most-likely lived many years later, identified in some manner with the life of David. Bernhard W. Anderson wrote, “It may well be that in the earliest period of the collection of the Psalms the superscription *leDawid* designated psalms that were used in the royal (Davidic) cult...”⁷ This assumption is very weak and unsupportable. Jesus and the apostles, in quoting psalms with this title, always

⁶ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1969), 463.

⁷ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 17.

attributed the psalm to David. In this particular psalm, the title continues, **בְּמִדְבַּר יְהוּדָה** (when he was in the wilderness of Judah). This indicates the exact time in which the Psalm was written by David (most-likely around 980 B.C.). Although the contents of this psalm give the precise historical referent and clearly indicate David as the author, scholars such as A.A. Anderson still claim “this must be a later interpretation of the poem, which may have originally been a Prayer of an accused man.”⁸ It is a serious stretch to think that someone living at a later time would write this psalm to express identification with David at this time in his life. One clear grammatical reason it is untenable is found in the second verse. Here David declares **מַיִם לֹא בְּלִי** (my flesh yearns after you in a dry and weary land where there is no water). Here, David says that he is literally in the wilderness of Judah, as mentioned in the title.

There are at least four historical references in Psalm 63. The first historical reference comes in the title (see comments above). The second historical reference is found in verse 3, where David says, **כִּן בִּקְדָשׁ חַיִּיתִיךָ** (thus I have looked upon You in the holy place). The holy place here likely alludes to Mount Zion, where David longed to be. He referred to the procession of the ark of the covenant into Mount Zion in a similar way in Psalm 68:24. The third historical reference is found in verse 10, which says **וְהִמָּזָה לְשׂוֹאֵה יִבְקָשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי** (but those who seek the devastation of my life). Per the discussion above, this refers to Absalom and the men who rebelled with him. The fourth historical reference is to himself as **הַמֶּלֶךְ** (the king) in verse 12. This flies in the face of the theory that someone during the postexilic period wrote the psalm and attributed it to David. First of all, there was no king at that time. Secondly, claiming that an unknown author would refer to himself as the king because he empathized with David is bold statement that requires solid evidence. This kind of statement calls the inspiration of the Bible into question.

It is important for the believer to understand how Psalm 63 fits within the “big picture” of redemptive history. This passage is truly timeless. God’s people have always been able to seek Him, call upon Him, and call Him “my God.” In verse 2, David says **אֲשַׁחֲרֶךָ** (I shall seek You). Earlier in redemptive history, we find Job’s “friend” Bildad the Shuhite imploring Job **אֵל־אֵל תִּשְׁחַר אֱלֹהִים** (if you would seek God) in Job 8:5. In verse 2, David called God “my God.” Years earlier, Jacob vowed in Genesis 28:21 that **יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים** (the LORD will be my God). Also, in the song of Moses in Exodus 15:2, we find the words **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי** (this is my God). Similarly, Joshua called Him **יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי** (the LORD my God) in 14:8-9, Ruth called Him **אֱלֹהֵי** (my God) in 1:16, and David did on many other occasions (e.g. 2 Samuel 22). In verse 2, David mentions that he has seen God in the sanctuary and witnessed His great power and glory. Of course, this is true for God’s people from the beginning of time. Adam fellowshiped with God in the cool of the garden. The Israelites, under Moses, saw the glory of God on numerous occasions: on the mountain, in the cloud, reflecting off of the face of Moses, etc. Praising (v.4) and blessing (v.5) are also characteristic of God’s people throughout history. If verse 6, David claims that **תִּשְׂבַּע נַפְשִׁי** (my soul is satisfied). This is also a prevalent theme in

⁸ A.A. Anderson, “Psalms 1-72” in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 455.

the history of God's people. For example, Abraham died as **זָקֵן וְשָׂבֵעַ** (an old man satisfied with life) in Genesis 25:8. The idea in verse 7 of **אָהָה־בְּךָ** (meditating on [God]) can be seen very early also. One of the most well known occurrences of this concept occurs in Joshua 1:8, where he tells the people to **וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה** (meditate on [the Word of God] day and night). This same idea is also found in Psalm 1:2. The concept of God as a **עֲזָרְתָה לִּי** (help to me) in v.8 is also seen in Job 6:13. The idea that **דָּבַקְהָ נַפְשִׁי אַחֲרָיִךְ** (my souls clings/cleaves after [God]) in verse 9 is found in Deuteronomy 10:20, Joshua 22:25, etc. The knowledge and confidence that **בִּי תִמְכָּה יְמִינְךָ** (I am upheld by Your right hand) in verse 9 is found in the song of Moses (Exodus 15:6, 12).

Literary Analysis

The psalms can be considered their own genre. Although some people group them into the wisdom literature, they are distinctively unique. Although the psalms are written in poetic style as songs and incorporate Hebrew parallelism, the psalms capture real history and present theology from the framework of day-to-day life experience.

When doing exegesis on a psalm, it is sometimes helpful to recognize which group it is in. Psalm 63 is in Book 2 of the Psalms. Although one may be tempted to attempt to categorize the psalms by book, the most likely reason for division into these five books is symmetry.

Although the order of the psalms is not clear, it appears as if Psalms 1-90 are grouped by author and 91-150 are grouped by subject matter. Psalms 51-72 are all Psalms of David. David wrote at least 69 of the psalms in the Psalter. He wrote them at various points in his life and for various reasons. Because of this, we cannot really glean much from the "category" of this psalm except that it flowed out of the heart of David. Thankfully, there are some historical markers that allow us to understand the psalm in light of the historical context (see previous section).

Although some categorize the psalms into groups, such as Narrative Psalms, Psalms of Lament, Penitential Psalms, Songs of Thanksgiving, Hymns of Praise, Festival Songs and Liturgies, and Songs of Trust and Meditation,⁹ it is not easy to cleanly compartmentalize them into tidy categories. Many of the psalms contain aspects of multiple groups. Psalm 63 is a great example of this. Although it is categorized as a Song of Trust and Meditation by Bernard Anderson and an Individual Lament by A.A. Anderson,¹⁰ we can find aspects of most of these categories present in it. In the inscription to this psalm (v.1), David tells us the historical situation in which we find him. In this sense, the psalm has narrative qualities. David laments the fact that his enemies seek his death (v.10). Without using the word "thanks," we find David thanking God throughout the entire psalm. In many ways, it can be considered a hymn of praise, since David exults in **לְרֵאוֹת עֲזֶךָ וּכְבוֹדֶךָ** (seeing Your power and glory) in v.3. In the next verse, he says **שִׁפְתַי יִשְׁבַּחֶנִּיךָ** (my lips will praise You).

There are three main themes in the psalms: praise, response, and communion. The psalms capture man's praise to and worship of God, the response of God's people to God, and the relationship and communion between God and man. Psalm 63 contains an abundance of emphasis on these themes. Regarding the first of these three, David praises God for **וּכְבוֹדֶךָ עֲזֶךָ** (Your power and glory) in verse 3. He proceeds by responding **כִּי־טוֹב חֲסִדֶךָ מִחַיִּים**

⁹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 213-217.

¹⁰ A.A. Anderson, "Psalms 1-72" in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, 455.

(because Your loving kindness is better than life), with praise **יְשַׁבְּחוּנִי** (my lips will praise You) in verse 4. Furthermore, his praise continues with blessing, lifting his hands in the name of God (v.5), offering praise with joyful lips (v.6), singing for joy (v.8), and rejoicing in God (v.12). In terms of second theme, David's response to the presence and greatness of God in verse 2 is **לֵךְ נַפְשִׁי כָמוֹה לֵךְ בְּשָׂרִי** (I shall seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh yearns for You). Another important response is satisfaction and contentment. David, even amidst hiding for his life, writes, **תִּשְׂבַּע נַפְשִׁי** (my soul is satisfied) (v.6). A third important response is meditation on God (v.7). David also responds in faith, believing that God will protect him from those who seek to destroy his life (vv.10-12). The third theme, communion, can also readily be seen in Psalm 63. David proclaims **אֱלֹהִים אֱלֵי אֲתָהּ** (O God You are my God) in verse 2. He reveals intimacy with God by saying **כִּי־הָיִיתָ עֶזְרָתִי לִי** (for You have been my help) in verse 8 and **דָּבַקָה נַפְשִׁי אַחֲרֶיךָ בִּי תִמְכָּה יְמִינֶךָ** (My soul clings/cleaves to You; Your right hand upholds me) in verse 9. Furthermore, the use of the personal pronouns I, my, You, and Your, throughout the text displays a personal, intimate relationship between David and God. The pronouns my and I are used 19 times and You and Your are used 17 times. So, these personal pronouns are used 36 times in the span of twelve verses!

Some people desire to find distinctive features of Psalm 63 that would identify it as being part of a group. Given the arguments previously stated about the true difficulty of compartmentalizing psalms into tidy subgroups, suffice it to say that Psalm 63 is a psalm and a psalm of David. Beyond that, I would not assign it to any subgroup.

The literary form of Psalm 63 is Hebrew poetry. Since it is poetry, we readily find semantic parallelism (parallelism of meaning). Lowth noted in 1753 that parallelism is the chief characteristic of Biblical Hebrew poetry. Kaiser wrote,

The definition Lowth supplied has never been superseded: "The correspondence of one verse or line with another, I call parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it in sense, or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction, these I call parallel lines; and the words or phrases, answering one to another in the corresponding lines, parallel terms." From Lowth's day to this, it has never been seriously questioned that parallelism, as he defined it, is the dominant stylistic feature of poetry in the Old Testament.¹¹

Within Psalm 63, there is only one parallel word pair. This is found in verse 2. David's statements, "*my soul has thirsted for You*" and "*my flesh has yearned for You*" are not two ways of saying the same thing. Instead, they are complement and complete each other, since the soul and the flesh are the two parts of man's being. Here, David uses grammatical parallelism to proclaim that he is seeking after God with both his immaterial being and his material being. In other words, he is seeking God with everything he has. These two phrases are grammatically parallel in Hebrew, as represented below.

¹¹ Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), 212.

c b a c a b
 לְךָ נַפְשִׁי צָמְאַהּ לְךָ (my soul thirsts for You)

c' b' a' c' a' b'
 לְךָ בְּשָׂרִי כָּמְוָה לְךָ (my flesh yearns for You)

According to Kaiser, Hebrew poetry avoids several grammatical constructs. The first grammatical construct he claims that Hebrew poetry avoids is the use of the definite article. In Psalm 63, the definite article is found in verse 3: בִּקְדָשׁ (in the holy place). Here, its use specifically indicates that he is specifically alluding to the sanctuary. It is used a second time in verse 10: בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת הָאָרֶץ (the lowest parts of the earth). Here, it is specifically referring to *the* earth, as opposed to land or ground. A third use is found in verse 12: וְהַמֶּלֶךְ (and the king). As in the other instances, this usage is again significant, because in the historical context, Absalom was trying to usurp David's kingship. The fourth use is also found in verse 12: כָּל־הַנִּשְׁבָּע בּוֹ (all those who swear by him). Although Kaiser has stated that Hebrew poetry avoids the definite article, it is used all throughout wisdom literature (used 1,962 times throughout Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). The second grammatical construct Kaiser claims that Hebrew poetry avoids is the accusative marker, which is not used in Psalm 63. The third grammatical construct is the ו conjunction. This is used in verse 2: בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה וְעֵיף (in a dry and weary land). Here it is used to join together two adjectives with one noun. It is also used in verse 3: עֹזָה וְכְבוֹדָהּ (strength and glory), verse 6: חֵלֶב וְדֶשֶׁן (fat and fatness), verse 6 again: וְשִׁפְתַי (and my lips), verse 8: וּבִצֵּל כַּנְּפֵיךָ אֲרַנֶּן (in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy), verse 10 (as a disjunction): וְהֵמָּה לְשׂוֹאֵה יִבְקְשׁוּ (but those who seek to destroy my life), and verse 12 (as a disjunction): וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יִשְׂמַח בְּאֱלֹהִים (but the king will rejoice in God). Similar to the definite article, this is actually used all throughout wisdom literature (used 4,408 times throughout Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). The fourth grammatical construct Hebrew poetry avoids per Kaiser is the relative pronoun, which is not used in Psalm 63. The fifth grammatical construct is the consecutive/conversive forms of the verb, which is also not used in Psalm 63. Kaiser argues that occurrences of these five grammatical constructs in poetry are rare.¹² Per my comments above, it seems that the conjunction and the definite article are used somewhat regularly in poetry. Perhaps, however, the frequency is significantly lower than in non-poetic writings. Overall, I would say that Psalm 63 is consistent with these indicators of Hebrew poetry.

The primary literary device used in Hebrew poetry is semantic parallelism. In Psalm 63, we find many examples of this, some in the form of synonymous parallelism and others in the form of antithetic parallelism. Verse 3 contains synonymous parallelism. Seeing God in the holy place and seeing His power and glory are parallel ways of communicating the same truth. A second synonymous parallelism is found in verse 5. Blessing God throughout life and lifting up hands in His name are parallel ways of communicating the same truth. Verse 9 also contains synonymous parallelism. Clinging to God with your soul and begin held by God are parallel ways of communicating the same truth. Verses 9-10 contain antithetic parallelism. They contain

¹² Ibid., 213-214.

a contrast between being held and upheld by God versus going into the lower parts of the earth. Verse 11 contains synonymous parallelism. Gushing forth over the hands of the sword and being a portion for the foxes are parallel ideas. Verses 11-12 contain antithetic parallelism. They contain a contrast between the destruction of the lives of the evildoers and the king rejoicing in God. Verses 12 also contains antithetic parallelism. Everyone who swears by God will glorify Him with their mouths, while the mouths of the liars will be stopped. Note that swearing by God contrasts with lying.

With regards to identifying strophes, Kaiser wrote, “Hence, what the paragraph is to the exegete of prose, the strophe is to the exegete of poetry”¹³ and “the identification of the strophe is not an optional matter for the exegete.”¹⁴ In terms of identifying markers, there are no uses of the term *selah*. Additionally, there is no alphabetic acrostic scheme as in Psalm 119. Furthermore, I cannot see any examples of chiasm, anacrusis, or distant parallelism. Although it may appear that, in the psalm as a whole, the concept of verbally praising and rejoicing in God acts as a refrain that is repeated throughout the psalm. If this is the case, then the refrain is repeated in v.4 (praising God with lips), v.6 (praising God with mouth/lips), v.8 (joyful singing to God), and v.12 (rejoicing in God). Then, the conclusion of the whole matter (v.12) is that those who align with David will also praise God (i.e. glory) while those who don't will have their mouths stopped. However, repetition and reiteration are common in Hebrew poetry, are they are used in Psalm 63, as we will see in the next paragraph. G. Cambell Morgan wrote, “The song can hardly be divided, for it runs on in a continuous outpouring of praise.”¹⁵ Therefore, the literary structure of this psalm is most likely sets of couplets.

The literary device of repetition was employed by David several times throughout Psalm 63. The term נַפְשִׁי (my soul/life) is used four times. He proclaims צָמְאָה לְךָ נַפְשִׁי (my soul thirsts for You) in verse 2, תִּשְׂבַּע נַפְשִׁי (my soul is satisfied) in verse 6, and אֶחְרֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי (my soul clings to you) in verse 9. All of this is in the context of enemies who לְשׂוֹאָה יִבְקָשׁוּ (seek the devastation of my life, v.10). Here, David uses the literary device of repetition to convey the need for and blessing of God's ownership over one's soul/life. We cannot be satisfied by thirsting after other things. Only be clinging to the Lord God can we be satisfied, even when we face devastation in life. The לְ preposition is used ten times. It is used to describe where David is physically (in the desert of Judah...in a dry and weary land, vv.1-2), where he has seen and experienced the presence of God (in the holy place, v.3), when he will bless God (in life, v.5), how he will operate (in Your name, v.5), what he will do (meditate on you, v.7), when he will do it (in the night watches, v.7), where David is spiritually (in the shadow of Your wings...in Your grasp, vv.8-9), where his enemies will be (in the lowest parts of the earth, v.10), and Who he rejoices in (God, v.12). The conjunction כִּי is found three times. In verse 4, David states that he will praise God *because* God's lovingkindness is better than life. In verses 7-8, he says that he meditates on God *because* God has been his help. In verse 12, he says that all who swear by God will glory in Him *because* God will stop the mouths of the liars. Here, David shows true reasons for devotion and passion toward God. We do not praise God, meditate on God, and swear by God simply because we should. We do so, because God is good. As believers, we know this experientially, not just doctrinally. We know that His love is better

¹³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁴ Ibid., 217.

¹⁵ G. Campbell Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Fleming H. Revell, 1947), 112.

than life. We know that He helps us. We know that He works in our lives. We know Him. This psalm also begins and ends with אֱלֹהִים. In the first statement of verse 2, David proclaims that אֱלֹהִים (God) is אֱלֹהֵי (my God). At the end of the psalm, David, proclaims that he will יִשְׂמַח בְּאֱלֹהִים (rejoice in God). This is a great illustration of God-centered worship. David also uses repetition locally in verse 2 to emphasize his longing *for God*. He says, לֵךְ בְּשָׂרֵי, לֵךְ צִמְאֹן לֵךְ נַפְשִׁי כָמוֹהָ (my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You). His construction is all inclusive. Both parts of his being, the immaterial soul and the material flesh, long for God. The presence of the second person pronoun makes it clear that this longing is not for some intangible, impersonal substance, but the personal and real God.

Another literary device used is to shift from personal address to the third person in the final verse of the psalm. By doing this, David made an obvious shift that can hardly go unnoticed.

Verse-by-Verse Grammatical-Syntactical Analysis

Before offering a verse-by-verse analysis of the text from the original language, it is important to have a working translation. The following is my own essentially-literal translation of the Masoretic Text.

¹ A psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah. ² O God You are my God. I will seek You. My soul has thirsted for You; my flesh has longed for You in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ³ Thus, I have looked upon You in the holy place, to see Your power and Your glory. ⁴ For better is Your faithful love than life. My lips will praise You. ⁵ Thus, I will bless You as long as I live. In Your name I will lift my hands. ⁶ Just like fat and fatness, my soul will be satiated; my mouth will praise You with shouts of joy on my lips. ⁷ Whenever I remember You on my bed in the night watches, I meditate on You ⁸ for You have been a helper to me, and in the shadow of Your wings I will shout for joy. ⁹ My soul clings after You. Your right hand has taken hold of me, ¹⁰ but they seek to ruin my life. They will go into the inner parts of the earth. ¹¹ They will gush forth on the hands of the sword. They will be the portion of the foxes, ¹² but the king will rejoice in God. Everyone who swears by Him will glory. For the mouth of those speaking deception will be stopped.

Verse 1 The first word, מְזִמֹּר, a noun derived from the verbal root זָמַר, which means “to sing or make music,” is often translated as “Psalm”. It is used 57 times in the Hebrew OT. All of these occurrences are in the titles to Psalms. 37 of the 57 are ascribed to David. The LXX uses the phrase ψαλμὸς to translate this Psalm and all but one of the other 57. Only Psalm 39:1 (38:1 in LXX) is translated as ᾠδὴ. The word בְּהִיְוֹתוֹ also occurs in the same form in Psalm 142:1, where it is translated as “when he was in.” Here, David was in the wilderness, and in Psalm 142, he was in a “the cave.” This verse is the only place in the Hebrew OT that the phrase בְּמִדְבַּר יְהוּדָה (in the wilderness of Judah) is used. The word מִדְבַּר (wilderness) also occurs in 1 Samuel 23:14ff, 26:2, 2 Samuel 17:29, Psalm 29:8, and Psalm 107:33, 35.

Verse 2 The phrase is אֱלֹהֵי translated “my God” throughout the Psalter (18:3, 22:2, 22:11, 68:25, 89:27, 102:25, 118:28, 140:7). The phrase אֱלֹהִים is also used throughout the Psalter to

say “my God.” Some liberal scholars claim that this psalm and others originally contained יהוה (LORD) instead of אלהים (God), “because in the Elohist psalter (Ps. 42-83) the divine name ‘Yahweh’ has been changed, in most cases, into ‘God’”.¹⁶ However, this conclusion is highly speculative, and no evidence exists to support the claim. The first note in the Masorah Parva is keyed to the Masorah Magna. The Masorah Parva states that there are only two occurrences of the form אֶשְׁחַרְךָ (I will seek You) in the OT. The Masorah Magna gives the other occurrence, Isaiah 26:9. These are the only two occasions where someone addresses God in the second person saying, “I will seek You.” All other references to seeking God are in the third person. Since it is derived from the word for “dawn,” the KJV translates this as “early will I seek thee” and the LXX uses the term ὀρθρίζω (I rise early in the morning). The verb שָׁחַר (to seek) is also found in Psalm 78:34. It is also used to refer to seeking God in Job 8:5, Proverbs 1:28, 11:27, and Hosea 5:15. Proverbs 7:15 depicts a fool seeking after a prostitute with the same intensity that we ought to seek after God. Proverbs 8:17 contains a promise that those who seek the Lord will find Him (cf. Matthew 7:7 for a similar idea found in later revelation). The form צָמְאָה is also found in Psalm 42:3 (my soul has thirsted). Here, the Psalmist writes, לְאֱלֹהִים צָמְאָה נַפְשִׁי (my soul thirsts for God). See also Isaiah 44:3, 55:1. Verse 2 marks the only use of the term קָמְנָה in the entire O.T. The force of the term is longing/fainting for God. The term בְּשָׂרִי (my flesh) is used here in a similar way as it is used in Psalm 84:3. Compare and contrast with Psalm 119:120. Additionally, compare the expression בְּאֶרֶץ-צִיָּה וְעֵיף (in a dry and weary land) to Psalm 143:6, בְּאֶרֶץ-עֵיפָה (as a weary land). This verse is very similar to what David is saying in Psalm 63. The idea of a land without water is contrasted with Psalm 65:10 “the stream of God is full of water” and Psalm 107:35 “He changes a wilderness into a pool of water And a dry land into springs of water”. The first note in the critical apparatus pertains to the word בְּאֶרֶץ (in a land) in verse 2. The note says that a few manuscripts (pc Mss) translate have the translation “as a land” or “as in a land.” For example, the Syriac Peshitta has בְּאֶרֶץ (as/like a land), and the Symmachus Greek manuscript has ὡς ἐν γῆ (as in a land). Essentially, the editor is pointing out here that a few manuscripts include the word “as” before the phrase “in a land”. Interestingly enough, the inclusion of this little two-letter word could actually have some exegetical impact. One could argue that the inclusion of the word “as” would provide evidence that David did not write the Psalm. Without its inclusion, we find a clear statement from David who is literally in a dry and weary land. On the other hand, if this term was present, it would serve to introduce a simile. In this case, one may be tempted to think that the author of the Psalm, perhaps writing many years after David was in the wilderness of Judah, is only identifying himself with David or actualizing Davidic experience, as Sigmund Mowinkel and others have taught. When we evaluate this editorial suggestion, we find that there is no reason to consider the inclusion of the term “as.” First and foremost, none of the most significant manuscripts include this addition, including the Septuagint. Second, there are very few manuscripts that actually do support this addition. Third, the more simple translation would be the one without the extra term. Thus, when we put all of this together, we conclude that a later editor most likely inserted the word “as” in an attempt to make David’s metaphor of spiritual

¹⁶ A.A. Anderson, “Psalms 1-72” in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, 455.

thirst more vivid. The second note in the critical apparatus pertains to the word וְעֵיף (masculine singular adjective meaning “and weary”) in verse 2. The note says that a few manuscripts (pc MSS), which are not named by the editor, have the feminine singular form of the same adjective: וְעֵיפָה. In my estimation, this variant is at least worthy of consideration. Although there really is no exegetical significance here, the Masoretic text presents a grammatical challenge that can easily be solved by acceptance of the variant. In essence the text says, בְּשָׂרִי בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה וְעֵיף, כְּמִנְהָ לָךְ. Here, we have the feminine singular noun and adjective בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה (in a dry land) joined to the masculine singular adjective וְעֵיף (and weary). The problem with the Masoretic text is that there is no masculine singular noun in the immediate context that can be modified by וְעֵיף. The only candidate would be בְּשָׂרִי, but there are several reasons why it could not be modified by וְעֵיף. First, the two words are separated by the prepositional phrase בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה (in a dry land). Second, the fact that the adjective is joined with the conjunction וְ makes it impossible to modify בְּשָׂרִי. The presence of the conjunction forces the adjective to be joined to the feminine singular phrase בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה. Therefore, it does not match in gender with that which it is modifying. In the Septuagint, the entire phrase is translated with matching gender: σοῦ ἡ σὰρξ μου ἐν γῆ ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἀβάτῳ καὶ ἀνύδρῳ (my flesh *longed* for You in a barren and untrodden and dry land). Here, the noun γῆ (land) is dative feminine singular, as are the adjectives that modify it. However, despite this seemingly unwarranted mismatch in grammar, there exists an exception in Hebrew grammar in which feminine nouns can be modified by masculine adjectives. According to Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, “When *two* adjectives follow a feminine, sometimes only that standing next to the noun takes the feminine termination.”¹⁷ Examples include 1 Kings 19:11, 1 Samuel 15:9, Jeremiah 20:9. According to Gesenius, “a similar dislike of the feminine form may also be observed in the case of verbal predicates referring to feminine subjects.”¹⁸ Given this fact, I am inclined to trust the Masoretic Text as it stands. The third note in the critical apparatus pertains to the phrase בְּלִי־מַיִם (without water) found in verse 2. The note says “firt dl m cs” (perhaps delete on account of the meter). I do not believe this note is worth much if any consideration. There is no substantive textual reason given to believe that this phrase should be deleted. There are no manuscripts cited. The opinion to remove these is simply a suggestion by the editor on the basis of poetic form. Therefore, I do not consider it worthy of much thought. The Bible is inspired by God, and the Masoretic Text is highly accurate and reliable. Given these two heavyweight facts, I would never suggest removing something purely on the grounds of aesthetics. This can result in smoothing out an inspired text based upon the limitations of man. On the contrary, we should strive to understand the unexpected aspects of the text that do not appear to be logical.

Verse 3 The form בִּקְדֹשׁ (I have seen you in the holy place) is also found in Psalm 68:8, where it is translated as “*in holiness*” in the NASB. However, the ESV, CSB, and YLT translate it as “*in the sanctuary*” and the KJV as “*in the holy place.*” The LXX also has the article (i.e. τῷ ἁγίῳ), which usually triggers “the holiness” to be understood as “the holy place”, i.e. the sanctuary. The same exact term is found again in 68:25, and it is translated consistently as

¹⁷ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, 2nd English Edition*, (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1910).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

“in/into the sanctuary.” The same is true for Psalm 74:3. However, in Psalm 77:14, we find the translation as “Your way, O God, is holy” in most of the modern translations and “Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary” in the KJV. In this particular case (Psalm 77:14), I would probably side with the modern translations, since “sanctuary” would not fit here. In our psalm, however, I believe that it is appropriate to translate this term as “in the holy place.” However, I do not believe that David is only making a historical reference and appealing to his memory of sensing the presence of God in the holy place some time in his past. He begins his sentence with the term כִּן (thus/so/therefore) and, in context, says כִּן בִּבְקֶרֶשׁ חַיִּיתִיךָ (thus/so/therefore I have seen you in the holy place). Since this word is used to conclude or elaborate on what has just been said, it is important to note the connection to the previous verse. David had just said בְּשָׂרִי לָךְ נַפְשִׁי כָמָה לָךְ צָמְאַהּ לָךְ נַפְשִׁי כָמָה לָךְ (my soul has thirsted for You; my flesh has yearned for You). It is in this sense that he says “thus, I have seen You in the holy place.” In other words, David was stating that God was just as present with him in the desert as He was in the sanctuary. Leupold argues, “The cultus of the sanctuary as such, through beloved by the writer, is not all-important; he is able to have fellowship with God apart from the outward aids to worship. This is a fine instance of discriminate worship: loving the forms that God appointed – regarding God rather than these forms as essential.”¹⁹ The term עֲזָרָה is also used to depict the strength of God in Psalms 21:2, 21:14, 28:7, 46:2, 61:4, etc. In 29:11 and 86:16, the Psalmist declares that God will grant strength to His people. The exact form (i.e Your strength) is also used in 59:17, 66:3, 77:15, 86:16, etc. The form כְּבוֹדֶךָ is found in Psalm 26:8. Here, the house of the LORD is described as the place where His glory dwells. The form is also found in 57:6, 57:12, 102:16, and 108:6. Both terms (glory and strength) are used together in Psalms 29:1 and 96:7, where all people are called to ascribe to Him glory and strength.

Verse 4 The exact phrase כִּי־טוֹב חַסְדֶּךָ (For/because Your faithful love is good/better) is also found in Psalms 69:17 and 109:21. In both cases the LORD’s faithful love is declared to be good. In our passage, the psalmist goes even further. God’s faithful love is not just good; it is better than life itself. “This gives the reason why [David] so eagerly thirsts after God...”²⁰ In 86:5, 100:5, 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, 118:29 and 136:1, He is declared to be good on the basis of His lovingkindness. Psalm 27:13 makes an interesting connection. Here the psalmist states that “I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!” (ESV). David, the author of Psalm 63, is the same person who previously asked the Lord to “open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise” (Psalm 51:17). Now, David is actively choosing to trust the Lord and praise Him with his lips, even amidst perilous times. We can all learn a valuable lesson from this. “Happy indeed is the soul who is able to make sorrow the occasion of a song, and darkness the opportunity for shining.”²¹ Psalm 71:23 contains similar sentiments. Here the psalmist declares that his lips will shout for joy when he sings praises to God because of His redemption. In Psalm 119:171, the psalmist says that the motivation for the praise on his lips is the Word of God. Without being redeemed and hiding the God’s Word in his heart, praise would be the last thing coming from the lips of David or anyone

¹⁹ Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 463.

²⁰ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, “The Book of Psalms,” in *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 232.

²¹ Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 112.

else. An interesting verse related to praise is Psalm 145:4, which states that one generation will praise the mighty acts of God to another. Through the inspiration of Scripture, this is exactly the result of David's sentiments in this verse.

Verse 5 The form אֲבָרְכֶךָ (I will bless You) is also found in Psalm 145:2, where it is also used in conjunction with הַלֵּל (praise). The Psalmist proclaims that he will bless God as long as he lives (בְּחַיֵּי). This same form is also found in Psalms 104:33 and 146:2, where the Psalmist declares that he will sing praises to God as long as he lives. Psalm 104:34 then attaches meditation to worship of God as well as rejoicing in God (i.e. delighting in Him). This is the chief end of man. The phrase בְּשִׁמְךָ (in Your name) is used throughout the Psalms as a representation of the covenant relationship between God and His people. It is used, then, to represent everything entailed by and through that relationship. For example, by the name of God, His people will trample down their enemies (Psalm 44:6) and be saved from their enemies (Psalm 54:3). They will rejoice in His name (Psalm 89:17) and lift up their hands in His name (Psalm 63:5). In short, those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (cf. Romans 10:13). On the contrary, those who do not call on the name of the Lord will receive His wrath (Psalm 79:6). In the New Testament, we see this connection drawn out in that those who do not believe in the Son of God will remain under the wrath of God (John 3:36). Similarly, Romans 5:9 promises *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."* Due to our covenant relationship with Him, we can confidently say, *"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,"* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The fourth note in the critical apparatus pertains to the term בְּשִׁמְךָ (in Your name) in verse 5. The note says "cf 2,2^b" (compare to note 'b' of Psalm 2:2). The note pertaining to Psalm 2:2 says thus the Leningrad Codex, many manuscripts of Hebrew editions according to Kennicott, de Rossi, and Ginsburg (sic L Edd) indicate a missing accent mark (rebia mugrass). This note is not exegetically consequential. When the psalmist promises to lift up his hands (אֲשָׂא כַפָּי) in the name of the LORD, He is giving a physical symbol of what is happening inwardly during worship to God. In true worship, a person lifts up his soul to God (see vv.1, 6, and 9 for use of "soul" in this psalm). As David expressed elsewhere, נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׂא (Psalm 25:1). A beautiful picture of the psalmist lifting his hands to God is found in Psalm 119:48, where he says וְאֲשָׂא-כַפִּי אֶל-מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְאֲשִׁיחָה בְּחֻקֶיךָ (And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes). This also highlights the importance of meditation on God's Word as an integral act of worship.

Verse 6 The psalmist proclaims that his soul is satisfied in the Lord. This is a satisfaction that can "be likened to that of a hungry man who has sat down to a feast of rich things that completely met his needs and now rises from the table. There is no deeper satisfaction."²² This is the essence of spiritual maturity. It is one thing to claim to be satisfied in God while everything is going well. It is quite another to be satisfied in Him when in distress and danger. True worship leads to true satisfaction. When David says, תִּשְׂבַּע נַפְשִׁי (my soul is satisfied), he echoes the sentiments of Psalm 107:9, which says, וְנַפְשׁוֹ שֶׁקָּה וְנַפְשׁוֹ רָעֵבָה מִלֶּאֱטוֹב כִּי-הִשְׂבִּיעַ (For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is

²² Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 466.

good). To be satisfied (תִּשְׂבַּע) in God is the essence of true worship. This is satisfaction comes from a true relationship with God where there is intimacy. This is depicted in Psalm 65:5 as being one whom God has chosen to bring near to Himself to dwell in His courts and feast in His house. This also speaks to God as provider. Psalm 145:16 states that God opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. The psalmist is satiated/filled with חֶלֶב וְדָשֵׁן (fat and fatness). This is another reference to true worship. Per Psalm 22:30, all of those on earth who are filled in this way, will eat and worship. The believer's confidence in God is that God has "prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies," because God has ראשי כוסי רייה (saturated my head with fat / anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows). The fact that proper attitude is essential to worship is further highlighted in the fact that David proclaims that וּשְׂפִתַי רִנְנוֹת יְהוָה (my mouth will praise You will shouts of joy on my lips). He is not offering praise out of duty or obligation. These praises are not dry and dispassionate. Quite the contrary! True worship is filled with passion. We are to serve the Lord, and we are to serve the Lord in a very specific manner: with gladness. We are to come before Him with singing, and we are to sing in a very specific manner: with joy (Psalm 100:2). In fact, it should be hard to restrain our lips from praising Him (Psalm 40:10). Of course, just as He is the object of our praise, God Himself is also the source of our praise. We cannot manufacture praise by our own willpower. He must open our lips (Psalm 51:17). In the New Testament, Luke 6:45 states that the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart. Given this, we will begin to speak psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to each other when we let the Word of Christ dwell richly within us (Colossians 3:16). Therefore, the fruit of true intimacy with God and true worship is a mouth that offers praise. We, like David in Psalm 34:1, ought to desire that בְּכָל־עֵת תְּמִיד תְּהִלָּתוֹ בְּפִי (His praise shall continually be in my mouth). Our mouths ought to be filled with His beautiful praises all day long (Psalm 71:8). In addition to this, our thanksgiving and praise to God ought to be abundant (Psalm 109:30).

Verse 7 The psalmist stated that he meditates on God upon remembrance of Him (אִם־זִכְרֹתֶיךָ). Psalm 22:28 states that all of the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD and worship Him. Psalm 77:7 is also very similar in that the psalmist ties together remembrance with meditation. Psalm 105:5 contains an imperative for the worshipper of the Lord to remember His wonders on the basis of God remembering His covenant (Psalm 108:5). Regarding meditation, remembering the ordinances of God is a source or comfort (Psalm 119:52). Here, as in our verse, the psalmist specifically states that he will remember the LORD's name in the quiet of the night. Several verses later (v.148), he states that he actually anticipates the night watches, לְשִׁיחַ בְּאַמְרֹתֶיךָ (that I may meditate on Your Word). This concept of remembrance is incorporated into the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (i.e. "do this in remembrance of Me," Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24). The psalmist declares אֲדַמְּנֶה־בְּךָ (I meditate on you). Psalm 1:2 states that we ought to meditate both יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה (day and night). On what should we meditate? Psalms 77:13 and 143:5 states that we should meditate on the work and deeds of God. MacClaren wrote, "So blessed was the thought of God, that, if once it rose in his wakeful mind as he lay on his bed, he 'meditated' on it all the night...If we would feel the majesty of the heavens, we must gaze long and steadfastly into their violet depths."²³ The

²³ Alexander MacLaren, "The Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible: Vol. III*, ed., by W. Robertson Nicoll, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1982), 165.

term **בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת** (in the night watches) was appropriately used by David. There was not better time to meditate on God than in the quiet stillness of the night and no better time to turn to God in dependent trust than the darkness and danger of the night when he was most vulnerable to attack by Absalom and his men.

Verse 8 The psalmist states that the LORD has been **לִי עֲזָרָה** (my help/helper). Here, he is verbalizing his remembrance of God that he spoke about in the previous verse. This concept of God as helper speaks of the immanence of God. Psalm 22:20 defines this in a way that is abundantly clear. Here, the psalmist pleads for the Lord, whom he calls **לְעֲזָרָתִי** (my help/helper), to be not far off and to hasten to his assistance (cf. Psalm 71:12). Psalm 27:9 adds to this understanding. Here, the psalmist asks the Lord to not hide His face from him, turn away from him, abandon him, or forsake him on the basis that the Lord has been his help. God's role as helper includes deliverance (Psalm 40:14). It implies that the Lord would help His children in their affliction and need without delay and that He would be mindful of them (Psalm 40:18). For He is *"a very present help in trouble"* (Psalm 46:2). Trusting God for help in trouble allows us to see our need for Him in light of our human frailty. It helps us to forsake any trust in self or man for what only God can provide (Psalm 109:13). When one does not turn to the Lord for help from our ultimate enemy, sin, he is left with nothing but death and hell (Psalm 94:17) instead of deliverance and redemption (Psalm 44:27). The psalmist rests **וּבְצֵל כַּנְּפֵיךָ** (in the shadow of your wings). David stated the same thing in Psalm 57:2, when he was fleeing from Saul in the cave. There, he states that he will take refuge in the shadow of His wings (cf. 36:8). In Psalm 17:8, he asks God to hide him there. God's "wings" provide shelter (Psalm 61:5). In Psalm 91:1, the psalmist speaks about dwelling and abiding in God's shadow. A few verses later (v.4), the covering of God's wings for refuge is a sign of His faithfulness and is likened to a shield and a bulwark. When the Psalmist meditates on God and thinks of His great works and the protection that is found in the shadow of His wings, he proclaims, **אֶרְנֵן** (I shout/sing for joy). This sentiment is found in Psalm 5:12, where the psalmist says that everyone who takes refuge in the shelter of God should sing for joy and exult in Him. We should shout for joy because God gives us victory and answers our prayers (Psalm 20:6), surrounds us with His lovingkindness (Psalms 32:11, 90:14), delivers us (Psalm 51:16), guides and judges (Psalm 67:5), redeems the souls of men (Psalm 71:23), and showers us with His goodness (Psalm 145:7). Therefore, *"let the godly ones exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds"* (Psalm 149:5). This ought to be only natural for God's people (Psalm 33:1).

Verse 9 The psalmist proclaims, **דָּבַקָה נַפְשִׁי אַחֲרֶיךָ** (my soul clings/cleaves after You). Here, he uses the same word as Moses used in Genesis 2:24 to describe how a man must leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife. The connotation is sticking, joining, and fastening oneself. So, just as this word represents the bond of the covenant of marriage, the marriage relationship represents the covenant relationship between God and His people. In Deuteronomy 10:20, the people are commanded to fear God, serve Him and cling to Him. In Deuteronomy 11:22, this is pictured as keeping His commandments, loving Him, and walking in His ways. How can this be done practically? Psalm 119:31 pictures the psalmist cleaving/clinging to the testimonies of God. The reason the psalmist is clinging to God is precisely given in this verse. God is holding/upholding him (cf. John 10). Just as the Lord is providentially **תּוֹמִיךָ גּוֹרְלִי** (holding my lot) per Psalm 16:5, He is holding and upholding the very lives of His children. As a result, He sets us in His presence forever (Psalm 41:12).

Realizing our dependence on God is a humbling, yet freeing reality for the believer. This child-like faith hearkens us back to our own conversions. This is beautifully represented in the child-like faith illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9ff) and Jesus' comments that followed: *"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all"* (Luke 18:17). The term יְמִינֶךָ (your right hand) signifies God's strength, direction, and protection for the believer (e.g. Psalms 60:5, 139:10), as well as His judgment and for the unbeliever (e.g. Psalms 21:8, 138:7).

Verse 10 David here states that his enemies לְשׂוֹאָה יִבְקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי (seek the devastation of my soul/life). In Psalm 35:1, David petitions God to יְהוָה אֶת־יְרִיבַי לֶחֶם אֶת־לִחְמִי רִיבָה (Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; Fight against those who fight against me). Throughout the psalm, we see David asking the LORD to be the salvation of his life against his enemies. For, his enemies seek his life מִבְּקֵשֵׁי נַפְשִׁי (35:4) just as they were doing here יִבְקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי (piel imperfect 3mp vs. piel participle mp in 35:4). In 35:8, David asks God to avenge his enemies with the destruction that they devised against him. Here, he pleads for the same thing, יָבֹאוּ בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת הָאָרֶץ (they will go into the depths of the earth). Upon reading this, the reader familiar with antecedent revelation immediately calls to mind the incident when God opened the earth and Korah and the other rebels were swallowed up. The fifth note in the critical apparatus pertains to the term לְשׂוֹאָה in verse 10. The note says that it should be read with (l c) the Septuagint as לְשׂוֹאָה (masculine singular adverb for "in vain" or "vainly"). The Septuagint translates the passage as αὐτοὶ δὲ εἰς μάτην ἐζήτησαν τὴν ψυχήν (but they sought my life in vain). Assuming that the original manuscripts did not include the ה is a bit problematic for several reasons. First, it is more likely that scribes would have inadvertently dropped the ה rather than adding one that should not be there. Secondly, although the remaining consonants are the same, the pointing of the term is completely different. Of course, this argument is not as strong, since vowel pointing was a later development, but even so, this would indicate that the error would have had to occur before the pointing system was developed (prior to 300B.C.).²⁴ Translating the term according to the Masoretic Text (i.e. *"they seek to ruin/destroy my life"*) or according to the Septuagint (i.e. *"they seek my life in vain"*) does not have any significant exegetical consequence due to the context. According to the MT, we still understand that the attempt is in vain, since David is the anointed king, and he immediately says *"they will go into the inner parts of the earth."* On the other hand, relying on the LXX translation would not preclude the interpreter from understanding that David's enemies were seeking to destroy his life. All in all, I believe that the interpreter is best served to rely on the Masoretic Text. There are several places in the psalms where the psalmist claims that foes נַפְשִׁי יִבְקְשׁוּ (seek my life). In psalm 35:4, 40:15, 70:3, and 71:13, David asks that they would be ashamed and dishonored, turned back and humiliated. In 54:5, David claims that they were seeking his life, because לֹא שָׂמוּ אֱלֹהִים לְנִגְדָם (they have not set God before them; cf. 86:14). Interestingly, David states that his enemies יָבֹאוּ בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת הָאָרֶץ (will go into the depths of the earth). A similar form of this phrase is used in Psalm 139:15 (the third note in the

²⁴ Ellis Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1994), 40.

Masorah Parva is keyed to the Masorah Magna. The Masorah Parva states that there are only 13 occurrences in the OT. The Masorah Magna gives the other occurrence with similar form, Psalm 139:15). Here, the phrase is used as a representation of the womb. In Psalm 86:13, the term תַּחְתִּי (depths) is seen in the phrase מִשְׁאוֹל תַּחְתִּיהָ (from the depths of Sheol). In 88:7, it shows up as בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת (the lowest pit). So, the term and the phrase are used quite differently in different contexts. The significance of each used must be determined on the basis of context. The sixth note in the critical apparatus says that some manuscripts (nonn Mss) have אָרֶץ instead of הָאָרֶץ in verse 10. This variant is minor, since adding or removing the article has no impact on the meaning of the phrase. To say that David's enemies "will go into the inner parts of the earth" or "will go into the inner parts of earth" is to say the same thing. Additionally, the most significant manuscripts, such as the LXX, agree with the Masoretic Text here, and include the article. Therefore, I see no reason to question the Masoretic Text here.

Verse 11 David says that his enemies יִגִּירוּהוּ עַל-יְדֵי-חֶרֶב (literally, "will be poured out over the hands of the sword"). This is a graphic picture of their death. This imagery was also used by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 18:21) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 35:5). The seventh note says that the term יִגִּירוּהוּ (Hiphil Imperfect 3mp + 3ms suffix) in verse 11 perhaps should be read יִגְרוּ (Hophal Imperfect 3mp per the Septuagint and Syriac Peshitta) or יִגִּירוּם (Hiphil Imperfect 3mp + 3mp suffix) or יִגִּירֵמוּ. As in other cases, I believe the Masoretic Text should be trusted at this point. Later scribes most likely recommended the Hophal form in an effort to smooth the text into a more logical form. The suffix also was not likely to be added into the Masoretic text. It would be much more likely for it to have been deleted or modified. The enemies will be יִהְיוּ שְׂעָלִים מִנַּת (a portion for foxes). The term מִנַּת (portion) carries the idea of an allotment that is due, and foxes, or jackals, were understood to prey on unburied carcasses.²⁵

Verse 12 David calls himself הַמֶּלֶךְ (the king) in Psalm 21:8, which is in the context of God's עֹז (strength, 21:1, 14; cf. 63:3) and יְמִינֶךָ (right hand, 21:9, cf. 63:9). This, in my opinion, provides greater evidence that David actually wrote the psalm as opposed to some unnamed person writing it for the purpose of identifying with David in corporate worship during the time of the second temple. David literally wrote this, and therefore הַמֶּלֶךְ is a literal title for David, the one who wrote the psalm. This word also contains grammatical emphasis, since it is the first word in the sentence instead of the verb. This verse implies a contrast. It begins with וְהַמֶּלֶךְ (but the king). The idea is that although the enemies will go into the depths of the earth (v.10), will be delivered over to the power of the sword (v.11), and will be a portion for foxes (v.11), David, the king, will rejoice in God (v.12), because נַפְשִׁי אֶחְרֶיךָ בִּי תִמְצָה יְמִינֶךָ (my soul clings after You; Your right hand has taken hold of me, v.9). Even more emphasis is added by the fact that this is the only time throughout the entire psalm that David refers to himself in the third person. David wrote, וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יִשְׂמַח בְּאֱלֹהִים (but the king will rejoice in God). Some of the connections with Psalm 21 were previously mentioned. However, another one exists. In Psalm 21:2, David wrote, בְּעֹזֶךָ יִשְׂמַח מֶלֶךְ (in Your strength the king

²⁵ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, "The Book of Psalms," in *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments Vol. II*, 233.

rejoices). Psalm 33:21 beautifully states, כִּי־בּוֹ יִשְׂמַח לִבֵּנוּ (for in Him our heart rejoices). Psalm 58:11 says, יִשְׂמַח צְדִיק כִּי־חָזָה נָקָם (the righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance [of the wicked]). This is exactly what David is anticipating in 63:12. Psalm 64:11 says that the righteous man will rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in Him. This is characteristic of all believers. As a result, Psalm 105 gives the imperative, לֵב מִבְּקֹשֵׁי יְהוָה יִשְׂמַח (let the heart of all who seek the LORD be glad). Here we are called to יִשְׂמַח בְּאֱלֹהִים (rejoice in God) as David does. Elsewhere in the psalms, we find boasting in God (44:9), trusting in God (56:5), taking refuge in God (62:8), placing confidence in God (78:7), and believing in God (78:22). The phrase כָּל־הַנִּשְׁבַּע (everyone who swears by Him [God]) is unique in the psalms. However, there are several places where we find God swearing to David through His covenant (Psalms 89:4, 36, 50; 132:11). This covenant relationship hearkens back to v.1: אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ (O God, You are my God). This verse contains the only occurrence of the term סָכַר (used in niph'al imperfect 3ms, “will be stopped”) in the Psalms. The only other place the niph'al stem of this verb is used is Genesis 8:2 (referring to the closing of the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky after the flood). Here David concludes by saying יִסָּכַר פִּי דוֹבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר (the mouth of those speaking lies will be stopped). This is a strong contrast to the mouth of the righteous, which is described six verses prior (v.6) as פִּי־יְהַלֵּל (a mouth that offers praises/glory). Here, David says כָּל־הַנִּשְׁבַּע בּוֹ יִתְהַלֵּל (everyone who swears by Him will glory). Speaking lies is characteristic of the godless. This descriptor is used several times throughout the psalms. Those who speak lies are known for speaking arrogantly against the righteous with pride and contempt, and they will be silenced (31:19). A godless person, by definition, is a person who loves speaking falsehood more than that which is right and who loves evil more than good (52:5). David promised the Lord that he would allow no one who speaks falsehood to maintain his position (101:7). In 144:8-11, David pleads with God to rescue and deliver him out of the hand of אֲשֶׁר פִּיהֶם דְּבַר־שָׁוָא וַיְמִינֵם יְמִין שָׁקֶר (those whose mouth speaks lies and whose right hand is a hand of falsehood). He asks this, because he believes that תְּמַכֶּה יְמִינֶךָ (your right hand upholds me, 63:9).

David used symbolic language in the form of figures of speech, metaphors, and plays on words throughout Psalm 63. In the beginning of the psalm, after stating that David wrote this while in הַיַּדְבָּר יְהוּדָה (the wilderness of Judah) David states that צָמָאָה לִּי נַפְשִׁי (my soul thirsts for you). Here, David uses his physical thirst בְּאֶרֶץ־צִיָּה וְעַיִף בְּלֵי־מַיִם (in a dry and weary land where there is no water) to symbolically describe the spiritual thirst he had for God. He then describes His intimacy in the “God-forsaken desert” as a time in which he חֲזִיתִיךָ בַּקִּדְשׁ (has seen God in the sanctuary). The idea of בִּשְׂמֹךְ אֲשָׂא כַפֵּי (lifting my hands in Your name) symbolizes the man who lifts his entire life to God in trust and child-like dependence. Following along with the desert imagery, Paul states that God will indeed more than meet his needs for spiritual food and drink כִּמוֹ חֵלֶב וְדָשֵׁן תִּשְׂבַּע נַפְשִׁי (just like fat and fatness, my soul will be satiated). David calls God his עֲזָרְתָהּ (help) and says that he will sing for joy לִּי וּבְצֵל כַּנְּפִיךָ (in the shadow of Your wings). This word picture envisions God protecting David as a mother bird protects her young in the safety of her wing. In verse 9, David

says, **דָּבַקָה נַפְשִׁי אַחֲרֶיךָ** (my soul clings to You). Here, the picture is David clinging and cleaving to God as if being glued to Him. There is also a play on the word “hand/hands”. God upholds the believer with His hand while pouring out the unbeliever over the hands of the sword. He states, **בִּי יְמִינְךָ יְמוּנָה** (I am held by Your right hand). This word picture, which is also employed by Jesus in John 10, illustrates why we can say that our soul clings to God. Verses 10-11 contain a play on words. Here, David says that those who seek to destroy His life will themselves be destroyed. Also, David’s soul/life that they are seeking to destroy is glued to God. David states that his enemies will be **יִגִּרְהוּ עַל-יְדֵי-חֶרֶב** (literally poured out over the hands of the sword) and **מִנְתַּ שְׁעָלִים יִהְיוּ** (will be a portion for the foxes). This serves as a graphic illustration of the power of God to punish sin. In the final verse, the mouth represents the total being. Those who believe in God will give Him glory now and forever, while those who don’t will be destroyed forever. Although we live in a fallen world with many evildoers and enemies of God, we can be comforted by the fact that some will indeed receive mercy to believe to the glory of God while others will receive justice to the glory of God.

Theological Analysis

From a theological standpoint, Psalm 63 contributes to the theology of the Christian faith. In the section on redemptive-historical analysis, we looked at how this passage fits into the big picture of redemptive history by examining its connections to antecedent revelation. In this section, we will briefly discuss the biblical doctrines to which the Psalm contributes, the theological issues raised and/or resolved, the psalm’s relationship to the nature of God, faith, and covenant, and messianic points under development.

Psalm 63 contributes to our understanding of the doctrine of God. This psalm offers rich insights into the nature of our God. The foremost attribute of God that is on display in this psalm is the imminence of God. In verse 3, David says, **כִּן בִּקְדָשׁ חֲזִיתִיךָ לְרֵאוֹת עֲזָךְ וּכְבוֹדֶךָ** (Thus I have seen You in the holy place, to see Your power and glory). His words here speak of a God who is not far off and out of reach, but near to those who love Him. This is why David could pray **אַל-תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי** (be not far from me) in Psalm 22:11 (cf. 22:19 and Isaiah 46:13). God has always been near to His people. He fellowshiped with Adam in the cool of the garden and even came to the Earth and housed Himself in human flesh. Even in the context of God reaching out to unbelievers, Acts 17:27 informs us that *“He is not far from each one of us.”* Many statements in Psalm 63 speak of a God who is near. God is David’s **עֲזָרְתָהּ** (help) and David rests in **בְּצֵל כְּנַפְיֶךָ** (the shadow of Your wings). This is why David could confidently state that his soul clings to God and God upholds him with His powerful right hand. A second attribute of God on display in Psalm 63 is God’s power. After stating that he has seen God’s power and glory in verse 3 and confidently stating that God has the power to hold him securely in His hand in verse 9, David expresses with certainty that God, through His power, will drive his enemies **בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת הָאָרֶץ** (into the lowest parts of the earth). God is all-powerful to save and protect His people. Two more attributes of God seen in this psalm are His justice and wrath. David understands that God will ultimately uphold His justice by exercising His wrath on evildoers. This is why he could confidently assert that God would indeed **פִּי דוֹבְרֵי-שָׁקֶר יִסְכֵּר** (stop the mouth of liars). Psalm 63:4 also brings to light God’s attribute of

lovingkindness. David's praise ushers forth כִּי־טוֹב תַּסְדִּיק מִחַיִּים (because Your lovingkindness is better than life).

Psalm 63 also addresses the doctrines of man, salvation, and worship, including their relationship to covenant and faith. As we have seen, the natural man is naturally in the state of being God's enemy and will ultimately receive justice and wrath. However, the one who is divinely saved by the grace of God enters into an intimate covenant with Him and becomes a worshipper of Him. David's words in this psalm express these concepts in beautiful language. His words אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ (O God, You are my God) are illustrative of his relationship with God. "By faith we enter into an intimate relationship with the Lord which is expressed in terms of mutual ownership."²⁶ God's covenant promise to His elect is that He would be their God and they would be His people (Leviticus 26:12). Given this, God is not just *a* God or even *the* God to the believer; He is *my* God. As mentioned, when a person becomes a believer and enters into covenant with God, he begins to express His faith in God through worship. This is beautifully illustrated by David throughout this psalm. We see him seeking, thirsting, and yearning for God (v.2), beholding God (v.3), praising God (v.4), blessing God (v.5), being satisfied in God (v.6), meditating on God (v.7), taking refuge in God (v.8), clinging to God (v.9), and rejoicing in God (v.12).

Psalm 63 is not explicitly of overtly messianic. However, one can argue that there are indeed messianic points under development in terms of the way in which David's experience in this psalm paralleled that of Christ. Here, we see David unjustly suffering by the hands of sinful men. Throughout his suffering, he seeks God without wavering, and God ultimately raises him up. In verse 12, we find the phrase יִתְהַלַּל כָּל־הַנִּשְׁבָּע בּוֹ (everyone who swears by Him will glory). There is a sense in which הַמֶּלֶךְ (the king) sets the precedent, and everyone who follows after him will be safe, but all who turn against him will receive wrath. This points us to Christ, because "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*" (John 3:36).

Sermon Outline and Propositions

Alexander MacLaren wrote, "The recurrence of the expression 'My soul' in vv.1, 5, 8, suggests the divisions into which the psalm falls... a separate phase of the experience of the soul in its communion with God is presented as realized in sequence by the psalmist."²⁷ Although the psalm is, for the most part, a single, continuous praise to God, I believe these divisions serve us well for exposition, exhortation, and application. Given this, I would use the following three-point outline to preach through this psalm (the verses here correspond to English versions):

- (1) The soul that thirsts for God, bursts for God (vv.1-4)
- (2) The soul that rests in God, blesses God (vv.5-7)
- (3) The soul that clings to God, sings to God (vv.8-11)

In each of these three sections, the psalmist begins with a statement regarding the desire of His soul for God and ends with a statement regarding the outpouring of worship from his soul to God. In the first section, the thirst of his soul for God (v.1) leads to the praise of his lips to God (v.3) as well as blessing God and lifting his hands to God (v.4). In the second section, his soul's satisfaction and contentment with God (v.5) leads to his outward display of worship to

²⁶ C.J. Williams, "The Pursuit of God in Psalm 63," <http://handfulwithquietness.wordpress.com/2010/03/22/the-pursuit-of-god-in-psalm-63/> (accessed 4/16/2010).

²⁷ MacLaren, "The Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible: Vol. III*, 164.

God in the form of meditation on God (v.6) and singing to God (v.7). In the third section, the desire of his soul to cling to God (v.8) leads to his rejoicing and glorying in God (v.11).

There are several truths and demands of the text with focus on the life and faith of the present church that I would address. First and foremost, it is imperative that a relationship with God to be established. In other words, one must first be saved before he can even address God as “my God” (v.1). Second, fellowship with God must be cultivated (v.1).²⁸ Other truth demands with focus on the life and faith of the present church are: always begin and end with God (vv.1, 11), seek God and passionately yearn for Him (v.1), gaze upon God in order to know Him more (v.2), see the power and glory of God in all circumstances (v.2), praise God for His lovingkindness always (v.3), bless God all throughout your life (v.4), worship God with your whole life (v.4), find your ultimate satisfaction in God, not other things (v.5), fill you mind with God Himself, not just the things of God (v.6), understand your weakness and joyfully take refuge in God (v.7), hold on to God as tightly as you can and be comforted that He is doing the same (v.8), and remember that God will ultimate come to judge the living and the dead (vv.9-11). Although we are highly unlikely to find ourselves in the position of hiding for our lives in a barren desert, believers in this age can and should find identification with David’s soul-desire and passion for God. To do so, “we need a soul that loves after the same manner...”²⁹

In terms of the church’s covenantal continuity with and connection to the text, I find it fascinating that this psalm was called “The morning Psalm” in the ancient church. Keil and Delitzsch appeal to Athanasius, Eusebius, and others to argue that with this psalm “the singing of the Psalms was always introduced at the Sunday service.”³⁰ Just as David had a personal, intimate relationship with the living God, so do His people in the church today. We are a kingdom of priests and can approach God directly through Christ. Just as many of the psalms do, Psalm 63 speaks not just to us, but for us.

Although this psalm is not specifically quoted in the New Testament, many of the themes and principles found in Psalm 63 are further developed in later revelation. For example, thirsting for God is found in Matthew 5:6, John 4, and Revelation 22. Matthew 6:31ff addresses priorities and seeking God first. Matthew 7:7ff talks about seeking and finding God. Worship in spirit and truth is found in John 4. God holding His people in the palm of His hand is found in John 10, and the future vengeance of God is addressed in many places throughout the New Testament, such as Romans 12-13 and Matthew 25.

Psalm 63 uniquely contributes to biblical doctrine by equating true intimacy with God with true passion in worship. It confronts us with an example of heart-felt, fervent worship flowing from child-like faith and dependence on God. In this psalm, worship of God is depicted as passionate, transparent, genuine, and urgent. David demonstrates the posture of his heart to be earnestly seeking God, thirsting and yearning for Him. So, this psalm is unique in that it allows believers to peer in on a very intimate time of worship in the life of David. It expresses praise, adoration, concern, trust, contentment, thanksgiving, confidence, and hope in a way that demonstrates worship as a passionate, yet meaningful expression of humble dependence on a real and living God, Who is ever present and near to those He loves.

²⁸ Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 112.

²⁹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Psalms,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume V*, 214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

Bibliography

Anderson, A.A. "Psalms 1-72" in *The New Century Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*. Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Brotzman, Ellis. *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1994.

Jamieson, Robert, Fausset, A.R., and Brown, David. "The Book of Psalms," in *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments Vol. II*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.

Kaiser, Walter. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 1981.

Kautzsch, E. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, 2nd English Edition*. New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1910).

Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F. "Psalms," in *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume V*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.

Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1969.

MacLaren, Alexander. "The Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible: Vol. III*, ed., by W. Robertson Nicoll. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1982.

Morgan, G. Campbell. *Notes on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Fleming H. Revell, 1947.

Perowne, J.J. Stewart. *Commentary on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1989.

Williams, C.J. "The Pursuit of God in Psalm 63." <http://handfulwithquietness.wordpress.com/2010/03/22/the-pursuit-of-god-in-psalm-63/> (accessed 4/16/2010).

Youngblood, R.F., Bruce, F.F., Harrison, R.K. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.