

"The Mighty God"

Psalm 50

This is the first of 12 psalms accredited to Asaph. The other 11 are grouped together: 73-83. There's no way to know for sure why this one is not grouped with the others so we can only speculate. I will say that the group of later Psalms of Asaph deal with Israel's historical struggles, and they call upon God to defend Israel against their enemies as they reflect on specific moments in their past when God delivered or chastened His people. Psalm 50 is different. Rather than Israel speaking to God, we have God speaking to Israel. This psalm turns the spotlight from being on the external relationship Israel had with God to the heart attitude and worship practice of God's people themselves.

Asaph was a Levite, son of Berechiah, and one of the three chief musicians appointed by King David to minister before the ark of the covenant (see 1 Chronicles 6:39, 15:17, 16:4-5). When David organized the worship life around the ark and later prepared for the temple, he appointed Asaph as the chief musician to lead worship "before the ark of the covenant of the Lord" according to 1 Chronicles 16:5. This wasn't just about musical skill – it was a position of spiritual leadership. Asaph was responsible for creating and leading worship that would draw Israel's heart toward God. The text tells us he used cymbals, which suggests he may have been both conductor and participant in the musical worship.

The concept of prophetic insight also connects to Asaph's role. In 2 Chronicles 29:30, Asaph is called a "seer," which is another term for prophet. This suggests he didn't just lead musical worship but also received and communicated divine revelation through his psalms.

There's an interesting parallel between Asaph as a leader of the worship in the temple as well as a prophet and the

pastor/teacher today. The pastor/teacher doesn't just lead people through a formal service or deliver unrelated or unrelatable messages. The most effective pastors help the congregation understand the deeper things of God – "why we believe what we believe." The beauty of this parallel is that it helps us understand that spiritual leadership principles don't change, even when covenant structures do. The specific forms of worship evolved from the Old Testament sacrificial system to New Testament patterns, but the need for leaders who can help people understand truth remains constant.

This psalm is built around the first few words: *"The mighty God, even the LORD."*

I. GOD, AS THE MIGHTY CREATOR OF THE WORLD, HAS THE RIGHT TO JUDGE THE WORLD – VS. 1-6

A. He proclaims His authority to speak – vs. 1

1. *"The mighty God, even the LORD"* (**אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה**) – literally translated as "God, Mighty One (אֱל), God (אֱלֹהִים), the LORD (יְהוָה)".
 - a) "El" – emphasizes God's power (fitting for a divine judge).
 - b) "Elohim" – the true God over all pretenders, as contrasted with the pagan gods of the day.
 - c) "YHWH" (Jehovah) – the covenant-keeping LORD who has a special relationship with Israel and the authority to judge His people.

B. He declares His power as judge – vs. 2-4

God appears as both judge and prosecutor, with the heavens and the earth (creation) serving as the jury. This context helps explain why the psalm takes the confrontational tone that it does.

- C. His judgment will be based on faithfulness to Him and His Word rather than external religious performance – vs. 5-6.

II. GOD, AS THE MIGHTY OWNER OF THE WORLD, HAS THE POWER TO CARE FOR HIS OWN – VS. 7-15

A. He addresses His people – “my people” – vs. 7.

1. This is speaking in the psalm about the people of Israel specifically, but by application, it speaks even today of those that are the children of God. In other words, it's speaking of believers.
2. *“I will testify against thee”* – what follows is God's correction for the reason behind what they were doing, not the action itself. The problem isn't that they're doing something wrong; it's that they're focused on the wrong things entirely.

B. He rebukes His people for “ritual without relationship” – vs. 8-9.

The Lord isn't rebuking sacrifice itself, but the formalism without a heart for God.

C. He reminds them that He doesn't need their offerings for sustenance because He already owns it all anyways – vs. 10-13.

This isn't a rejection of the sacrificial system itself, but a correction of the theological misunderstanding that treats God as if He were like pagan deities who need to be fed and sustained by human offerings. The Israelites were acting as if their sacrifices put God in their debt or gave them leverage in the relationship.

D. He reveals what He truly desires: a heart of thankfulness and obedience – vs. 14-15.

1. *"Offer unto God thanksgiving"* – in contrast to the mere ritual of sacrifice without proper attitude.

Hebrews 13:15-16

¹⁵ By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. ¹⁶ But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

2. Verse 15 can be seen by us today as a promise by God to answer our prayers in time of distress and deliver us.
3. Verse 15 has another view as well: it is called by some "the gospel call of the psalm." It doesn't present a complete presentation of salvation by grace through faith in Christ's atoning work, but it does present a picture of proper relationship with God that anticipates and prepares for the fuller revelation we see in the New Testament.
 - a) It states mankind's need and their helplessness: *"the day of trouble."* You might say this is their recognition that they are sinners in need of deliverance (a Saviour).
 - b) There's a response of faith to that need: *"call upon me."*

Romans 10:13

¹³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

- c) There's a promise to hear and answer that cry: *"I*

will deliver thee."

- d) It concludes with the ultimate purpose of all God's saving activity: *"and thou shalt glorify me."*

III. GOD, AS THE MIGHTY SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD, CONFRONTS SIN OF RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY – vs. 16-22

He exposes those who honor Him with their lips but deny Him in their actions, and warns of coming judgment if they do not repent.

A. They profess God's truth but reject His authority – vs. 16-17

Psalm 78:36-37

³⁶ Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. ³⁷ For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

Matthew 15:7-9

⁷ Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, ⁸ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. ⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

James 1:22

²² But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

B. They participate in sin while maintaining a religious front – vs. 18-20

1. There's a text in Isaiah chapter 1 (vs. 11-17) that is a powerful rebuke of outward religion while indulging in sin that fits this text in Psalm 50.

Isaiah 1:11-17

¹¹ To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. ¹² When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. ¹⁵ And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

2. There's a text in 2 Timothy 3 that is relative to our day that also speaks to this text in Psalm 50.

2 Timothy 3:1-7

¹ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴ Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; ⁵ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. ⁶ For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ⁷ Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Every generation of the church faces this same challenge: people who grow up in religious

environments, learn vocabulary, participate in the activities, but never experience the heart transformation that genuine conversion produces. They can recite doctrine, they know how to pray in public, they understand theological concepts, but their lives demonstrate that the gospel has never really taken root in their hearts.

C. They presume on God's silence and mistake it for approval – vs. 21-22

Ecclesiastes 8:11

¹¹ Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

IV. GOD, AS THE MIGHT DELIVERER OF THE WORLD, OFFERS THE WAY OF SALVATION TO THE OBEDIENT – VS. 23

This verse stands in intentional contrast to the hypocrites of verses 16-22. While they professed but did not possess true faith, this final verse reveals what God is truly after: a thankful heart and an upright life.

A. There's an interesting parallelism used in this psalm, and particularly as it applies to this verse.

1. Verse 23 ties directly to verse 14 in parallelism.
 - a) Vs. 14 – “Offer unto God thanksgiving...” (this is heartfelt worship)
 - b) Vs. 23 – “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me...” (uses the same word *todah* for “praise” in verse 23 and for “thanksgiving” in verse 14)
2. Both lines of verse 23 are parallel thoughts:
 - a) Offering praise (inner heart response)

- b) Ordering one's "conversation" (דרכו – way, path, conduct, lifestyle) – this is a common Hebrew idiom for one's moral direction.

B. "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God"

1. This is not saying that salvation is earned through moral behavior or righteous living, but rather that a life rightly ordered is the evidence of a heart that honors God; the same heart that offers Him thanksgiving and glorifies Him.
2. This verse should be read not as a condition to receive salvation, but as a description of those who truly know God and walk in the light of His truth. It affirms that the path of genuine worship and obedience leads to a fuller experience of God's deliverance.

The ancient Hebrew worldview didn't typically separate physical and spiritual reality the way modern Western thinking often does. When God promises salvation to those who order their ways rightly, that salvation would likely encompass the totality of human flourishing: spiritual, physical, relational, and communal. The person who lives in right relationship with God experiences God's blessing and deliverance in every sphere of life.

Conclusion: The psalm opened with, "The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken." He is not silent, nor indifferent, nor just an observer. As we've seen in this psalm:

- He is the Creator who has the right to judge the world.
- He is the Owner who has no need of empty offerings

but delights in thankful hearts.

- He is the Saviour who sees through religious masks and calls out hypocrisy.
- And He is the Deliverer who opens a path of salvation to those who glorify Him in truth.

The psalm ends with a warning (vs. 22) and an invitation with a promise (vs. 23).

The warning of verse 22 is not given to atheists or godless pagans, but to those who profess to be God's people, yet forget him in practice. It is a warning against mere outward religion; against assuming that our offerings, songs, or church attendance can cover for a rebellious heart.

What a blessing to know, however, that the psalm doesn't end there. It ends in grace – vs. 23.