

**PSALM 143**  **GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY**  
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

*Lovingkindness in the Morning*  
**March 10, 2024**

**I. IMPACT**

**A. Lesson:** Ps 143 shows us how to pray for God’s help while meditating on His perfections and His past actions & while being mindful that we are undeserving of His mercies.

**B. In the New Testament:** A **Pauline** Psalm

1. The Apostle Paul adapts the wording of v. 2 in his teaching about justification by faith when he says, “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Rom. 3:20; Gal 2:16).
2. Paul uses David’s confession in 143:2b to teach the universal problem of man’s sinfulness and our inability to earn our own righteousness.
3. Martin Luther called Ps 143 a “Pauline psalm” because of the way Paul uses it to teach justification by faith.

**C. In Christian Tradition:** A **Penitential** Psalm

1. In the early centuries of the church, seven psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143) were designated as “penitential psalms,” songs useful for expressing sorrow for sin. (This list of seven songs does not include all the psalms where the author confesses sin.)
2. Ps 143 is the most general of these as David does not confess any particular sin but describes it as a universal condition.
3. By the Middle Ages, these songs were used in a much more ritualized way to earn indulgences and the like.

<p><b>PSALM 143</b> © M. Scott Bashoor 2024</p> <p><b>PURPOSE:</b> Distressed by the ongoing threat of deadly enemies and vulnerable because of his own imperfections, David prays to Yahweh, the God who has proven Himself faithful and righteous, to respond to his plight.</p> <p><b>Type:</b> Lament of the Individual <b>Author:</b> David (c. 1040-970 BC) <b>Date:</b> Unknown; Perhaps during Absalom’s rebellion (c. 990 BC) <b>Note:</b> Traditionally counted as one of the 7 Penitential Psalms <b>Collection:</b> Part of the final set of Davidic songs (Pss 138-145)</p>							
<p><b>HEADINGS</b> V. 0</p> <p>Song Type A “Psalm” (intended for instrumental accompaniment) Authorship David</p>	<p><b>LAMENTATION WITH CONFESSION &amp; CONFIDENCE</b> PLEADINGS FROM AN IMPERFECT BELIEVER IN DISTRESS vv. 1-6</p>			<p><b>PETITIONS TO THE FAITHFUL &amp; RIGHTEOUS GOD</b> URGENT REQUESTS FOR DIVINE INTERVENTION! vv. 7-12</p>			
	<p>Opening Prayers for Yahweh’s Merciful Help vv. 1-2</p> <p>Initial Pleadings to the Faithful &amp; Righteous One v. 1</p> <p>Confession of His Own Imperfect Righteousness v. 2</p>	<p>Recitation of Persecutions Suffered vv. 3-4</p> <p>Pursued to the Brink of Death by the Enemy v. 3</p> <p>Emotionally Overwhelmed by His Troubles v. 4</p>	<p>Confession of Trust in Yahweh’s Care vv. 5-6</p> <p>Recollection of Yahweh’s Past Dealings v. 5</p> <p>Expectant Pleadings for Yahweh’s Intervention v. 6 [Selah]</p>	<p>Pleadings for Immediate Deliverance v. 7</p> <p>For Yahweh to Answer the Fainting Servant v. 7a</p> <p>For Yahweh to See to the Deadly Plight v. 7b</p>	<p>Pleadings Based on Personal Trust in Yahweh vv. 8-9</p> <p>For New Morning Mercies v. 8a</p> <p>For Practical Direction v. 8b</p> <p>For Dramatic Deliverance v. 9</p>	<p>Pleadings Based on Spiritual Commitment v. 10</p> <p>For Yahweh’s Instruction in His Will v. 10a</p> <p>For the Spirit’s Aid in Making Progress v. 10b</p>	<p>Pleadings Based on Yahweh’s Reputation vv. 11-12</p> <p>For Life Renewal Based on Yahweh’s Righteous Reputation v. 11</p> <p>For Deliverance by Judgment Based on Covenant Faithfulness v. 12</p>

## II. GENRE: Lament of the Individual

- A. While some have called this a wisdom psalm because of its prayers for direction and guidance (vv. 8 & 10), it contains most of the elements commonly found in laments.
- B. Labeling it a penitential psalm is potentially misleading because most of the poem deals with the crises David faces from his enemies. The psalm contains **15** requests for help.

## III. SETTING

### A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

- 1. The heading (v. 0) indicates that the author is David.
- 2. Some interpreters think the psalm comes from the same period as Ps 142 which refers to David's hiding in a **cave** from Saul. (Cf. the "dark places" in 143:3.)
- 3. While there is no historical note in the Hebrew text, ancient tradition dates this song to Absalom's rebellion (c. 990 BC).
  - a. The heading the Septuagint reads, "A psalm of David when his son pursued him."
  - b. This may well be the historical setting and could account for the confession of sinfulness in v. 2. The "enemy" in v. 2 is singular (Absalom?) while vv. 9 & 12 mention plural "enemies" (Absalom's followers?).

### B. PLACEMENT

- 1. Pss 138-145 are the last Davidic pss in the Psalter. The first and last (138, 145) are songs of thanks, and most of the ones in between are laments or contain laments.
- 2. Pss 142 and 143 both speak of troubling enemies, and both songs share an identical Hebrew phrase for, "my **spirit** is overwhelmed within me" (142:3; 143:4).

## III. COMMENTARY

- A. **Familiar yet Intimate:** Ps 143 contains numerous phrases found in earlier psalms, but it is by no means stale. The strong petitions, confessions, and devotions make this a strikingly intimate psalm.
- B. **Internal Echoes:** Ps 143 echoes not only other pss but itself.
  - 1. God's "faithfulness/lovingkindness" and "righteousness" are mentioned in the beginning and end (vv. 1, 11-12).
  - 2. David calls himself the Lord's "servant" (vv. 2, 12).
  - 3. David contrasts his own failing "spirit" (vv. 4, 7) with Yahweh's "good Spirit" (v. 10).
- C. **Compounded Phrases:** The song contains several triple phrases.
  - 1. V. 1 = three calls for help
  - 2. V. 3 = three descriptions of suffering
  - 3. Vv. 7-8 = three imperatives (plus a fourth prohibition)
  - 4. Vv. 11-12 = three opening prepositional phrases ("for," "in").
- D. **Dark Places (v. 3):** The term "dark places" is only used 7 other times and is sometimes associated with the **grave**. The phrasing here uses the same Hebrew words as Lamentations 3:6.
- E. **The Last Selah (v. 6):** The final word of v. 6 is the last instance of "Selah" in the Psalms. In this case the term helps to mark the midpoint of the song.
- F. **New Morning Mercies (v. 8):** David asks to see deliverance in the morning. While this might suggest that the psalm was an evening song (cf. Ps 141:2b), what's more likely in view is that David wants the figurative night of anguish to come to an end.
- G. **The Spirit's Role (v. 10):** Few ancient roads were hard packed enough to handle wheeled transport. David asks for God's Spirit to instruct Him and pave the way for him spiritually as he responds to his trials.