

A STUDY ON PSALMS 42 AND 43

Scripture references are to the King James Version unless stated otherwise

Prefatory Notes

Psalms 42-70 comprise what is styled the Second, or Exodus Book, and touch upon Israel's ruin (42-49); Israel's Redeemer (50-60); Israel's Redemption (61-72).

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ff in a reference means 'and following'

'Monarchy: The age of David and Solomon was one of high development in poetical and historical composition: witness the elegies of David (2 Samuel 1: 17 ff; 3: 33, 34), and the finely-finished narrative of David's reign (2 Samuel 9-20), the so-called "Jerusalem-Source," admitted to date "from a period very little later than that of the events related". There were court scribes and chroniclers. . . . David, as befits his piety and poetical and musical gifts, is credited with laying the foundations of a sacred psalmody (2 Samuel 23: 1 ff), and a whole collection of psalms (Pss 1-72, with exclusion of the distinct collection, (Psalm 42-50)), once forming a separate book (compare Psalm 72: 20), are, with others, ascribed to him by their titles (Psalms 1, 2, 10 are untitled). It is hardly credible that a tradition like this can be wholly wrong, and a Davidic basis of the Psalter may safely be assumed. Numerous psalms, by their mention of the "king" (as Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 33; 45; 61; 63; 72; 110), are naturally referred to the period of the monarchy (some, as Psalm 18 certainly, Davidic). Other groups of psalms are referred to the temple guilds (Sons of Korah, Asaph).'

- *Intl. Standard Bible Encyc.*; 1939; online only: internationalstandardbible.com/

PSALM 42

1 As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

'The full force of this similitude is rather obscured in the *Authorized Version*. To appreciate the Psalmist's thought, we must remember that for a continuous six or seven months of the year rain never falls in Palestine. With very few exceptions the rivers and streams dry up, and then the only water supplies are the springs and wells, and cisterns hewn in the rock (Jeremiah 2: 13). Wherever a good and constant spring exists, a village is generally to be found. Sometimes the water must be conducted from the spring's source to the houses, and in such cases a covered-in aqueduct may be used. Holes are pierced at intervals through the cover of the aqueduct, to prevent bursting from the accumulation of air. There appears good reason to believe that it was an aqueduct like this to which the Psalmist referred and that the text should read, "As the hart panteth over the aqueduct," etc. The hart knows that the water is there, for it can both hear and smell it through the air-holes in the cover.

The animal pants after the life-giving water, but is unable to quench its thirst. We can well imagine the distress of the poor hunted creature as it stands over the closed-in waterway in the midst of that dry and thirsty land!’ (Morton Edgar, *Waiting on God*, Souvenir Notes, Bible Students Convention, 1915)

For the Christian nothing is as vital as the Word of God, the figurative water that refreshes the mind and heart and cleanses one from sin (John 4: 10). Jesus Christ is the epitome of Truth, by whom the will and ways of the Father are revealed to the responsive child of God. The interrogatory, ‘when shall I appear before God?’, sustains and parallels the theme – the longing to be in the presence of God, a heavenly prospect, however, reserved for the ‘little flock’ of the Gospel Age (Luke 12: 32; John 14: 2, 3).

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3 My tears have been my meat [constant as daily food – *Ed*] day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

The Psalmist finds himself under extreme harassment, mocked by those who denigrate him and his God. Thus was Christ derided even as He hung on the cross: ‘He trusted in God; let him [God] deliver him now, if he will have him’ (Matt. 27: 43),

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4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had [previously – *Ed.*] gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.

On v. 4 *Young’s Literal Translation* reads: ‘These I remember, and pour out my soul in me, For I pass over into the booth [feast of tabernacles; Lev. 23: 41-43 – *Ed.*], I go softly [peacefully – *Ed.*] with them unto the house of God, With the voice of singing and confession, The multitude keeping feast!’

Companions who had formerly fellow-shipped with him and with whom he had celebrated the appointed festivals now reviled him. So was it with Christ: cheered on by the crowds who strewed His entry into Jerusalem with victory palms rejected Him soon after (Matt. 23: 37-39). Judas betrayed Him. Thus was He ‘despised and rejected of men’ (Isa. 53: 3).

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5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

Note that v. 5 is repeated in v. 11 and in Psa. 43: 5. The meaning is in each case plain.

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6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

‘These [two] psalms comprise a single, sadly beautiful poem in which the writer, exiled in the far north of Palestine (42: 6), yearns to return to the Temple in Jerusalem.’ (*The Ryrie Study Bible*; marginal note.) The land of Jordan, Mount Hermon and the ‘small hill’, Mizar, were all in the north of Israel.

‘It is not for one moment to be supposed that the Psalmist calls Hermon even, in comparison with his native Zion, the chosen of God. *i.e.*, the mountain of littleness: the other member of the antithesis, the majesty of Zion, is wanting In the vicinity of Mitz’are, a mountain

unknown to us, in the country beyond Jordan, the poet is sojourning; from thence he looks longingly towards the district round about his home, and just as there, in a strange land, the wild waters of the awe-inspiring mountains roar around him, there seems to be a corresponding tumult in his soul.’ – *Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary*

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7 Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts [cataracts - *Ed*]: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

‘In Psalm 42: 6 he [depicts] the natural features of the country round about him – and it may remind one quite as much of the high and magnificent waterfalls of the lake of Muzêrîb as of the waterfall at the course of the Jordan near Paneas and the waters that dash headlong down the mountains round about – and in Psalm 42: 7 he says that he feels just as though all these threatening masses of water were following like so many waves of misfortune over his head Billow follows billow as if called by one another . . . at the roar . . . of the cataracts, which in their terrible grandeur proclaim the Creator, God – all these breaking, sporting waves of God pass over him, who finds himself thus surrounded by the mighty works of nature, but taking no delight in them; and in them all he sees nothing but the mirrored image of the many afflictions which threaten to involve him in utter destruction’ – *Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary*

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8 [*Yet*; Heb. omit] The LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

His assurance of the LORD’s faithfulness returns to him, and the Psalmist anticipates peace of heart and mind.

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9 I will say unto God my rock [*crag, Ed.*], Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? **10** As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

As if wondering in himself, ‘*Why* would I *not* trust in God my rock or assume He has forgotten me? *Why* should I sorrow because some revile and oppose me? Their insults and accusations are as nothing. ‘Sword’: ‘The idea in the Hebrew is, that their reproaches were like breaking or *crushing* his very bones. The idea of the ‘sword’ is not in the original.’ – *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*

The restoration of the Psalmist’s prospects is reflected in the following verse.

11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

PSALM 43

1 Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. **2** For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

‘Do me *justice*, O God, and fight my fight against a faithless people; from the deceitful and

impious man rescue me' (*New American Bible*). Neither a specific 'man' nor 'enemy' is identified.

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3 O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Instruct your people with understanding and justice; lead them to Zion and to your dwelling [meeting] place. [See **Endnote** on the hymn, 'Send Out Thy Light and Truth, O Lord']

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4 Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

'The poet, in anticipation, revels in the thought of that which he has prayed for, and calls upon his timorous soul to hope confidently for it. . . . The poet knows no joy like that which proceeds from God, and the joy which proceeds from Him he accounts as the very highest . . . Removed back thither, he will give thanks to Him with the cithern [a guitar-like instrument]. . . . The hope expressed in Psalm 43:4 casts its rays into the prayer in Psalm 43:3. In Psalm 43:5, the spirit having taken courage in God, holds this picture drawn by hope before the distressed soul, that she may therewith comfort herself.' – *Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary*

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5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

The Psalmist closes his appeal with his now-familiar plaint and re-affirmation of his confidence in Jehovah.

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ENDNOTE

'Send Out Thy Light and Truth, O Lord'

Tune by Charles-Francois Gounod

Bio from Wikipedia (condensed)

'Charles-François Gounod (17 June 1818 – 18 October 1893), usually known as Charles Gounod, was a French composer. He wrote twelve operas, of which the most popular has always been *Faust* (1859); his *Roméo et Juliette* (1867) also remains in the international repertory. He composed a large amount of church music, many songs, and popular short pieces including his *Ave Maria* (an elaboration of a Bach piece) and "Funeral March of a Marionette". Born in Paris into an artistic and musical family Gounod was a student at the Conservatoire de Paris and won France's most prestigious musical prize, the *Prix de Rome*. His studies took him to Italy, Austria and then Prussia, where he met Felix Mendelssohn, whose advocacy of the music of Bach was an early influence on him. He was deeply religious, and after his return to Paris, he briefly considered becoming a priest. He composed prolifically, writing church music, songs, orchestral music and operas. . . . He died at his house in Saint-Cloud, near Paris at the age of 75. Few of Gounod's works remain in the regular international repertoire, but his influence on later French composers was considerable. In his music

there is a strand of romantic sentiment that is continued in the operas of Jules Massenet and others; there is also a strand of classical restraint and elegance that influenced Gabriel Fauré. Claude Debussy wrote that Gounod represented the essential French sensibility of his time.'

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Gounod also composed the motet, 'There Is a Green Hill Far Away', known to many English schoolchildren of the 1950s and '60s from their attendance at morning assembly.