

THE PSALMS

BOOK THE SECOND

PSALM 42, 43

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Debarred Worshipper Mastering his Sorrow.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, A Debarred Worshipper, Nursing his Grief, nevertheless Strives to Rise Above it. Stanza II., vers. 6-11, Deeply Feeling his Personal Condition, the Sufferer Encourages Himself by Recalling a Past Deliverance, and begins to Pray Hopefully, though Sorely Dismayed by Outward Troubles. Stanza III. (43), vers. 1-5, Looking his Public Troubles in the Face, the Psalmist Prays for a Triumphant Deliverance.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm.

- 1 As a hind cometh longing up to channels of water
so my soul longeth for thee O God!
- 2 Athirst is my soul for God—for a GOD who liveth,—
when shall I enter in and see¹ the face of God?
- 3 My tears have served me for food day and night,
through its being said unto me all the day—"Where is thy
God?"

1. So it shd. be—G. Intro., 458; and so it is in some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., Aram., Syr.)—Gn. "It is probable that in the original it was 'see the face of Yahweh'"—Br.

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- 4 These things would I fain remember and pour out upon my
my soul—
how I used to pass over in a throng—
used to lead them in procession unto the house of God,
with the sound of jubilation¹ and thanksgiving—
a crowd keeping festival!
- 5 Why shouldst thou despair O my soul and groan upon me?
Wait thou for God, for yet shall I thank him,—
as the great salvation² of my³ person⁴ and my God.⁵
- 6 Over myself⁶ my soul keeps despairing⁷ therefore will I
remember thee,—⁸
from the land of Jordan and the Hermons—from Mount
Mizar,—
- 7 Deep unto deep calling out to the sound of thy waterfalls:
all thy breakers and thy billows over one passed.
- 8 By day may Jehovah command his kindness and by night
his song,
with me a prayer to the God of my life.⁹
- 9 I would fain say to God—"O my Cliff! wherefore hast thou
forgotten me?
wherefore should I gloomily walk through the oppression of
an enemy?"
- 10 Like¹⁰ a shattering in my bones have mine adversaries
reproached me,
through their saying unto me all the day, "Where is thy
God?"
- 11 Why shouldest thou despair O my soul and why groan upon
me?
Wait thou for God, for yet shall I thank him,—
as the great salvation¹¹ of my person and my God.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "of a ringing cry."
2. Pr. "intensive."
3. M.T.: "his"—clearly in error for "my": cp. vers. 11 and (43) 5.
4. So O.G. 447a. Or: "the health of my countenance"; or: "the victory of my presence." The same alternatives apply to vers. 11 and (43) 5.
5. "Should probably be added"—Dr. To the same effect—Del.
6. Stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence.—Kp., Del.
7. Frequentative. "Is cast down" blunts the point.
8. That is, "what I learned of thee."
9. Specially fitting, if the writer was thinking of an occasion when God saved his life. Some cod. however read: "to a living God"—Gn.
10. So some cod. M.T.: *beth*, "With the effect of"; or "At the cost of"—O.G. 90a, "g."
11. Cp. ver. 5.

PSALM FORTY-TWO AND FORTY-THREE
PARAPHRASE

PSALM 42

As the deer pants for water, so I long for You, O God.

2 I thirst for God, the living God. Where can I find Him to come and stand before Him?

3 Day and night I weep for His help, and all the while my enemies taunt me. "Where is this God of yours?" they scoff.

4, 5 Take courage, my soul! Do you remember those times (but how could you ever forget them!) when you led a great procession to the Temple on festival days, singing with joy, praising the Lord? Why then be downcast? Why be discouraged and sad? Hope in God! I shall yet praise Him again! Yes, I shall again praise Him for His help.¹

6 Yet I am standing here depressed and gloomy; but I will meditate upon Your kindness to this lovely land where the Jordan River flows and where Mount Hermon and Mount Mizar stand.

7 All your waves and billows have gone over me, and floods of sorrow pour upon me like a thundering cataract.²

8 Yet day by day the Lord also pours out His steadfast love upon me, and through the night I sing His songs and pray to God who gives me life.

9 "O God my Rock," I cry, "why have You forsaken me? Why must I suffer these attacks from my enemies?"

10 Their taunts pierce me like a fatal wound; again and again they scoff, "Where is that God of yours?"

11 But O my soul, don't be discouraged! Don't be upset! Expect God to act! For I know that I shall again have plenty of reason to praise Him for all that He will do! He is my help! He is my God!

PSALM 43

(Nm.)

1 Vindicate me O God and plead my cause against a nation without kindness,
from a man of deceit and perversity wilt thou deliver me!

1. Literally, "for the help of His countenance."

2. Literally, "deep calls to deep at the noise of Your waterfalls."

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- 2 For thou art my protecting God—¹ wherefore hast thou rejected me?
wherefore should I gloomily wander² through the oppression of an enemy?
- 3 Send forth thy light and faithfulness—let them lead me, let them bring me into thy holy mountain³ and unto thy habitations!
- 4 So would I enter in unto the altar of God—unto the God who gladden my youth,⁴
so will I thank thee with a lyre Jehovah⁵ my God!
- 5 Why shouldst thou despair O my soul and why groan upon me? Wait thou for God, for yet shall I thank him,—
as the great salvation⁶ of my person and my God.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the sons of korah—"the patriarchs of song."
Cp. Intro., Chap. II., 3.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 43

O God, defend me from the charges of these merciless, deceitful men.

2 For You are God, my only place of refuge. Why have You tossed me aside? Why must I mourn at the oppression of my enemies?

3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth—let them lead me. Let them lead me to Your Temple on Your holy mountain, Zion.

4 There I will go to the altar of God my exceeding joy, and praise Him with my harp. O God—my God!

5 O my soul, why be so gloomy and discouraged? Trust in God! I shall again praise Him for His wondrous help; he will make me smile again,⁷ for He is my God!

1. Ml.: "My God of stronghold."

2. Or: "march to and fro." "Go mourning"—Del. "Why go I about in dark attire"—Dr.

3. Cp. 2 Ch. 3:1, 33:15, Isa. 30:29, Jer. 26:18, Mi. 3:12.

4. So the Sep.—a beautiful and suggestive reading.

5. So Sep., preferred by Kp. and others.

6. Cp. 42:5.

7. Literally, "He is the help of my countenance."

PSALM FORTY-TWO AND FORTY-THREE EXPOSITION

The crowning feature of this (double) psalm is its lofty and intense spirituality: A soul athirst for God; moved by strong desire for fellowship with God—to be conscious of his nearness, to be face to face with him; assured that such a realisation will be as satisfying as for a thirsty animal to drink of the cooling stream.

The next thing noticeable in this (double) psalm, is the beauty of its form—in three stanzas, each with a refrain repeated in identical words; and easily detected when this structure is observed, a gradual advance from sheer sorrow, to circumspect petition, and then to bold entreaty.

Perhaps the third thing to arrest our attention is, the psychological wonder of a Sufferer striving to master his sorrow and to rise above it.

Probably the surest way to observe these three leading features with interest and profit is to institute an investigation into the probable authorship of the psalm.

David has been thought of: though we are no longer under any obligation to presuppose that he wrote it, inasmuch as this psalm is really an "orphan" psalm, since undoubtedly "the sons of korah" were singers, or a class of singers, and not authors. Nevertheless, it is an interesting fact, that David has been regarded as the probable writer of this pathetic composition; several circumstances combining to give this hypothesis an air of probability—chiefly his intense love for the worship of Jehovah's house in Jerusalem, and his flight from the holy city on occasion of Absalom's rebellion. That David crossed over the Jordan, and then turned north, ascending the high lands of Gilead as far as Mahanaim, and so came into full view of Mount Hermon on the north is another circumstance rather favourable to this conclusion. The objections to this view are: *first*, That, even so, David did not go far enough north to get among the "waterfalls" of the Upper Jordan; and, *second*, That he was surrounded by faithful friends, all the time, and not by enemies who would keep mocking him with the taunt, "Where is thy God?"—to which we may add, *third*, That, formidable as was Absalom's rebellion, David would scarcely refer to it as "the oppression of an enemy." These considerations preclude our deciding for David. Some would add, that the very absence of David's name from the head of the psalm should, among other

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reasons, count for something, why David could not have penned this psalm,—seeing the many evidences of care to place his name wherever it had any right to stand.

Under these circumstances, some have thought of an unknown Levite as author, on account of the memory, so vividly preserved by the writer, of having headed processions to the Temple in happier days. This conjecture has little else to support it; and, in short, it can scarcely be said that any Levite occupied so important and central a position as this psalm requires. The desperate suggestion that this psalm may have been written by King Jehoiachin on his way to Babylon, may safely be dismissed; since the writer, at any rate, hoped soon to return to the holy city; and we must not go out of our way to court failure for the hope of the psalm.

It is time to say: That for no man, as author of this psalm, can such numerous and strong reasons be advanced as for King Hezekiah, notwithstanding one or two apparent reasons to the contrary. Let us look at the reasons for and against.

In favour of this conclusion the following weighty reasons may be alleged:—First, the writer appears to be suffering from two chief causes: one personal to himself, and one of a more public character. He is apparently suffering from some personal disease, which amounts to a disfigurement of his *face* or disablement of his *person*. Hence the force of his description of God as *the health of his countenance; or the salvation of his person, or the triumph of his presence*. And then there is an *enemy*, under whose oppression he has to groan, whose taunts he has to bear. Now the significant thing is: That in Hezekiah both these causes of suffering met: He was struck for death with leprosy, and the Assyrian army was at the gate of Jerusalem:—the Assyrian, a mighty and oppressive nation indeed— well answering to the description, “A nation without kindness,” whose foul-mouthed representative the villain Rabshakeh was, who mercilessly hurled his taunts against Hezekiah, and deceitfully perverted facts to degrade Hezekiah in the eyes of his own people. To these leading reasons in favour of the authorship of Hezekiah, there are several others to be added: Such as his “tears”—mentioned here, and mentioned in the history; his “lyre”—of which also we read both here and in the history; his enthusiastic participation in the worship of the Temple, in reference to which it may safely be said that the very word in the 4th verse (of

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Psalm 42) "passed over" or "crossed over" is exquisitely adapted to describe the king's procession from the Royal Palace to the Temple, since there was a splendid viaduct connecting the two. It is extremely unlikely that such a combination of reasons for any other author can be found.

The one objection that may be urged can easily be obviated. The writer, it may be said, was not merely a "debarred" worshipper but a *banished* worshipper; since he prays to be led back into the holy mountain, proving that he was away from Jerusalem. Standing alone, that objection might have been plausible, though not conclusive; seeing that the language is perfectly consistent with mere enforced banishment from Mount Moriah—"the mountain of the house" (Cp. 2 Ch. 3:1, 35:15, Isa. 2:2, 30:29, Jer. 26:18, Mi. 3:12), and we know that Hezekiah regarded it as an *ascent* to visit Jehovah's temple (Isa. 38:22). From that holy place, while his plague was upon him, he was debarred. Perhaps a still stronger objection to the claims of Hezekiah to be regarded as the author of this psalm, will be framed upon the assumption that the writer was far away from Jerusalem when he penned it—that, in fact, he was still among the *waterfalls* of the upper Jordan. But this assumption is quite to mistake that allusion—quite to lose grip of the fact that that allusion was a memory; a memory not recalled while he was in the north, but a memory of a thrilling experience which befell him when he was in the north. To be sure of this, we have only to adhere to an accurate rendering of 42:6: "*Over myself—over my own deplorable bodily condition, my soul keeps despairing—keeps falling into fits of despondency: therefore—because of this, that I may repress altogether this tendency to hopelessness, I will remember—I will recall an incident which befell me when I was a young man visiting the Upper Jordan: I will remember thee—in thy 'marvellous kindness' which was then 'made wonderful to me' by rescuing me from drowning in the rapids of the Upper Jordan. A storm came on; the waters, rolling down the mountain sides, caused a 'spate'; the waterfalls were roused to activity; the lakes into which their waters descended answered to each other, deep calling unto deep. I was in personal peril, all thy breakers and thy billows passed over me—all seemed lost, when I found myself landed on a cliff; the flood that engulfed me, saved me, it carried me to a safe spot—my feet*

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were on a rock: the waters abated, and I was saved! Yea, O my Cliff, O thou God of my life, the gladdener of my youthful days,—thus will I remember thee, and fortify myself against these fits of despondency." The beauty of the poet's picturesque reference can with difficulty be suppressed, however slovenly the translator's rendering, however dull the expositor's imagination. Nevertheless, it may perhaps be remarked, without presumption, that, for lack of a correct historical point of observation, the psalmist's graphic allusion has been deplorably enfeebled. The words have been inexactly rendered; the incident has been represented as part fact and part figure, to the enfeebling of both, instead of being first taken as a connected whole in its literal completeness, and then employed as a whole in its metaphorical application to the sufferer's now present bodily condition—as by no means excluding hope; the preposition *mem*, "from," has been assumed to bind the writer to be at the Jordan when he remembers, instead of leaving him free afterwards to recall the incidents from the Jordan: and thus, in fine, one of the most beautiful things in the Psalms has dwindled into very small dimensions indeed, and become unavailable for any practical purpose. Whereas, on the other hand, the treating of the whole thing as a memory, throws into delightful vividness both the singular designation of Jehovah as the writer's Cliff, and the peculiarly touching allusion to Jehovah as the *gladdener of his youth*. And thus, in fact, we are getting back not only Hezekiah's name into the authorship of the Psalms; but, as a consequence, we are recovering precious snatches of his autobiography.

Thus refreshed by our study, let us turn back again and make the first thing noticed, also the last thing to abide in our hearts. This we may do by the trite observation that we do not *thirst* for things of which we have no knowledge. To thirst for God as a living God, we must first know him to be such; and know the incomparable satisfaction to be thence derived. Hezekiah knew the living God of Israel: he had seen his face—only figuratively, representatively, adumbratively, it may be. But there was divine reality in it. The cloud of glory was there—behind the veil: the fire consumed the sacrifices: the Urim and Thummim gave responses: the prophets brought messages. The character of God gave the soul perfect satisfaction—his might gave protection—his promises imparted hope—his

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pardon inspired love. These things, Hezekiah had known and enjoyed; and, though for the present there was a hiding of Jehovah's face, the memory of the brightness and blessedness of its revelation was not lost. What he had once enjoyed he desired to enjoy again—desired with an intensity of desire and keen sense of need which only the figure of *thirst* could represent. We, too, must know God in order to thirst for him. May the blessed sense of nearness to him abide with us in all the freshness and force of the fuller revelation of himself which he has made in Christ Jesus our Lord!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree with the reasons of Rotherham for rejecting David as the author of this psalm? Discuss.
2. Discuss the arguments in favor of attributing this psalm to Hezekiah. (It would seem that Hezekiah is the master-organizer of many psalms—why is Rotherham so strong in this preference?)
3. Whoever wrote this psalm, his deep desire for God is a marvelous example for us. This is in a special way a psalm for all sometimes apathetic Christians. Read verses one through five for the attitude that will return us to our first love.
4. Suppose at sometime in our experience we were prevented from assembling—we were physically hindered from holding religious services—would the words of the psalmist in verses 4 and 5 relate to us? Discuss.
5. What is your estimate of Rotherham's interpretation of verses 6 and 7 as that of: "I will recall an incident which befell me when I was a young man visiting the upper Jordan."—? Discuss.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why are these two psalms here inseparably considered?
2. What were the charges made against the psalmist by the "merciless deceitful men"?
3. In what sense has God ever "tossed" anyone aside?
4. How can the highly figurative language of "send forth thy light and faithfulness"—have any bearing on our needs? Discuss.