

A COMMENTARY ON
THE PSALMS

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THE PSALMS

Volume 2 (42–89)

Allen P. Ross

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A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42–89)

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To my aunt and uncle,
The Reverend Leonard and Beatrice Sukut,
for a lifetime given to ministering the Word of God
in exposition and music

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PSALMS 42–43

Yearning for God

INTRODUCTION

Text and Textual Variants

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplative Poem.¹
For the Sons of Korah.²

1 As a deer³ pants⁴ for the water brooks,⁵

1. For Hebrew מְשָׁכֵל, the Greek version reads εἰς σύνεσιν, “for understanding.” See the Introduction.
2. The translation “For the sons of Korah” (which is the rendering in the Greek version, τοῖς υἱοῖς Κοραε) is better than “of the sons of Korah,” because a clan would not likely compose a psalm, but they could form guilds to sing it or to compile a collection.
3. MT has the masculine form לֵבָיִם, “hart”; many commentators assume the form should be the feminine לֵבָיִם to harmonize with the verb תַּעֲרַב, which occurs only here and in Joel 1:20. It is possible that the feminine ending ם might have been omitted by haplography. The singular noun could be taken as a collective for sense agreement.
4. The Greek version has ἐπιποθεῖ, “longs for” or “earnestly desires,” a word used for longing for water.
5. The Greek has πηγὰς, “springs/fountains (of water).”

- so pants my soul for you, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God,⁶ for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
- 3 My tears have been my food day and night,
while they say to me continually,⁷ “Where is your God?”
- 4 These things I remember⁸ as I pour out my soul:⁹
how I used to go with the throng¹⁰
and lead¹¹ them in procession to the house of God
with the voice of singing and praising,
a multitude keeping festival.¹²
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why do you murmur within me?
Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him,
for the salvation of his face—

6. This first “God” is not in the Greek version; it simply reads “for the living God.”

7. Literally, “all the day.”

8. For a vivid expression the text uses a cohortative הִזְכֵּרְנִי, followed by another cohortative הִשְׁפֹּךְנִי. The line could be translated “when I remember, then I pour,” or, “I would remember and (in the remembering) pour out.”

9. Literally, “my soul within me”; Greek translates לְפָנַי with ἐπ’ ἐμὲ, “upon me.”

10. The word תְּרוֹמָה occurs only here. It seems to mean a “thicket,” related to תְּרוֹמָה, and so refers to any interwoven mass, hence, a throng. Kraus suggests repointing תְּרוֹמָה to תְּרוֹמָה, “with the throng” to תְּרוֹמָה, “in a tabernacle (arbor).” This, he says, would make a better parallel with “the house of God” and harmonize with the tradition of the Greek version, which reads these two lines as “I will go to the place of your wonderful tabernacle (ἐν τόπῳ σκηνῆς θαυμαστῆς), unto the house of God” (Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, p. 437).

11. The form of the verb in the MT is הִלְכֵנִי, translated “I used to lead them.” The verb is a *hithpael* stem of הלך, “to move slowly” as in a slow procession. The problem is the suffix; the form would not have the meaning “lead” with a suffix, and so either the suffix would need to be deleted or the form repointed as a *piel* (הִלְכֵנִי) to get the idea of leading others in procession (see Perowne, *Psalms*, I:357). Craigie suggests a different root, הלך, meaning “hasten, run” (*Psalms*, p. 324). Kraus explains that the Greek text understood הִלְכֵנִי as an epithet of God and his sanctuary, and translated it “wonderful” (p. 437).

12. The Greek version has ἤχου ἐορτάζοντος, “a noise of one keeping festival.”

Yearning for God

- 6 O my God,¹³
my soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of the Jordan and of Hermon,¹⁴
from Mount Mizar.¹⁵
- 7 Deep calls to deep at the sound of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.
- 8 By day the LORD commands his loyal love,
and at night his song is with me,¹⁶

13. The problem is that this first refrain does not match the wording of the other two that have “for the salvation of my face and my God,” which form direct addresses to God, instead of the report about God which we find in this verse (“his face”). So the Greek version, along with the Syriac and Targum have “the salvation of my face” (Greek: *σωτήριον τοῦ προσώπου μου*), making the refrains identical in that respect; but the Greek follows MT in making “my God” the beginning of the next verse.

Most commentators follow a change in the text to harmonize all three refrains. A possible explanation is that the form of the text was confused: an original פני ואֱלֹהֵי (‘‘my face and my God’’) had the *waw* joined to the first word to yield ‘‘his face’’ (פְּנֵי); then ‘‘my God’’ was seen as repetitious and so dropped out. This all makes good sense, but it assumes that there can be no variation in a refrain of a psalm (other psalms with variations in refrains are 49:12, 20; 56:4, 10–11; and 59:9, 17). If the change was made to harmonize the refrains, then the Greek construction is secondary. The Hebrew probably preserves the original, for it would be difficult to explain a change from a standard refrain to what the MT has. The NIV obscures the problem with a paraphrase ‘‘my Savior’’; but it does insert the verse number before ‘‘my God’’: ‘‘my Savior and my God.’’

If the MT reading is retained, ‘‘salvation of his face’’ would be explained as ‘‘salvation from his favor’’ and the words would be about God. ‘‘My God’’ would then begin the next verse. If the variant reading is taken, then ‘‘my face’’ is the object of the salvation and the words addressed to God (‘‘the salvation of my face and my God’’).

14. The MT is plural, the ‘‘Hermons,’’ probably referring to the range. Greek rendering is *Ἑρμωνίμ*, ‘‘the Hermoniim.’’
15. The location of Mizar is unknown. L. Sabourin relates the difficulty of identifying the place, but then, following Dahood, suggests that the problem is eliminated if the psalm is taken figuratively (*The Psalms, Their Origin and Meaning*, p. 240). The Greek version simply translated the word ὄρους μίζαρ, ‘‘a small mountain.’’
16. There is an internal Greek variant that has ‘‘and manifest it by night’’; but the MT’s reading ‘‘and at night his song (שִׁירָה) is with me,’’ is confirmed in Greek (A). Kraus suggests changing the word ‘‘his song’’ to ‘‘I sing a

- a prayer to the God of my life.
- 9 I say to God, my rock:¹⁷
 “Why have you forgotten me?
 Why do I go mourning
 because of the oppression of *the* enemy?”
- 10 With a breaking in my bones¹⁸ my adversaries taunt me,
 while they say to me continually,¹⁹ “Where is your God?”
- 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why do you murmur within me?
 Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him,
 the salvation of my face and my God.

43

- 1²⁰ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
 against an ungodly people,
 from the deceitful and unjust man
 deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God of my safety;²¹
 why have you spurned me?
 Why do I go about mourning
 because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 Send out your light and your truth;
 let them lead me;

prayer by myself” (תַּלְוָה; *Psalms 1–59*, pp. 436–7). Further, he suggests emending verse 8 to read “By day I keep an eye out for Yahweh, and for his goodness at night.”

17. The Greek interprets the image with *ἀντιλήμπτωρ μου εἶ*, “you are my supporter/helper.”
18. The MT has “with a breaking in my bones” (not “of my bones”), the preposition meaning “consisting in.” So the meaning is “with a breaking in my bones” like a shattering blow, crushing the bones, is the taunt. . . . The Greek is slightly different, *ἐν τῷ καταθλάσαι τὰ ὀστά μου*, “while my bones were being crushed,” or more smoothly in the verse, “while my oppressors were crushing my bones.”
19. Or, “all the day”; the Greek translation has *καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν*, “day after day.”
20. The Greek version has a superscription with Psalm 43: “Psalm of David.”
21. The Greek has an interpretive translation: *κραταίωμα μου*, “(For you, O God, are) my strength.”

- let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, the joy of my exultation,²²
and I will praise you with a lyre,
O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why do you murmur within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him,
the salvation of my face and my God.

Composition and Context

Although these two psalms are separate in the MT and the English versions, they were one psalm originally. The clearest evidence for this is the refrain found in verses 42:5, 42:11 and 43:5. But there are other bits of evidence too: there are repeated expressions and ideas in the two psalms, in some of the editions of manuscripts the two are one psalm, and the *Midrash* has them as one psalm, like Psalms 9 and 10. But each psalm is complete in itself, which is why the division into two psalms was fairly easy. Apparently the division suited the liturgical use of the psalms better than the entire psalm. People could use Psalm 43 without appropriating the details of Psalm 42.

And Psalm 42 is unique in supplying details of the location. The psalmist is apparently separated from the formal place of worship in Jerusalem by some distance, finding himself in the mountainous regions of the sources of the Jordan. There is no explanation of why he was there; and there is no information about who the psalmist was. Different identifications have been proposed, such as David when he fled the palace, but there is no evidence for that. Besides, on that occasion David was not among mocking enemies but friends, and he did not go mourning all day long at that time, as far as we know. Others have suggested

22. MT has אֶל-אֵל שְׂמֵחַת נַיִלִי, “to God, the joy of my exultation,” meaning “my exceeding joy.” But the Greek version has πρὸς τὸν θεὸν τὸν εὐφραίνοντα τῆν νεότητά μου, “to God who makes glad my youth.”

a priest, one perhaps shut off from the sanctuary by Jeroboam I, or one banished by Athaliah. Still others suggest an exile in the east. But none of these suggestions can be supported with compelling evidence. All we can tell from the passage is that the psalmist was a leader, but not necessarily the king, that he was in the region of Hermon and not able to get to the sanctuary to resume worship, and that he was expecting a speedy restoration. So while the place is identified, the circumstances, date and authorship are not. The psalm is most likely preexilic, and perhaps early, because the psalmist expects to go to the sanctuary in Jerusalem; it does not fit the exile or the restoration.²³

The psalm may be classified as a lament, or rather as several laments. Psalm 42:1–4 is lament, and verse 5 the refrain; 42:6–10 is lament, and verse 11 the refrain; and 43:1–4 is prayer, and verse 5 the refrain. Although elements of laments are found in all portions, the first section more precisely focuses on his longing to return to Zion, the second forms the lament proper, and the third is the confident petition for vindication.²⁴

Expositors could develop separate expositions here, following the division in the English bibles—if they have the luxury of time for two messages instead of one. But it makes very good sense to combine the two psalms into one exposition, so that the message has both the occasion (Ps. 42) and the petition (Ps. 43).

It is also to be noted that here Book II of the collection of psalms begins.²⁵ This observation will not make a great deal of difference in the exposition of the psalm, but it will provide some important qualifications on the way the psalms have been edited

23. Kissane claims that all that can be said for certain is that the psalm was written when Jerusalem was under alien rule, and so it is probably the expression of one of the exiles in Babylon (*Psalms*, p. 185). How he knew that for certain is unclear; there is no support in the psalm for the idea.

24. See further Luis Alonso-Shökel, “The Poetic Structure of Psalms 42–43,” *JSOT* 1 (1976):4–11, along with the responses printed in the same issue; H. H. Rowley, “The Structure of Psalm 42/43,” *Bib* 21 (1940):45–55; N. H. Snaith, *Hymns of the Temple (Pss. 42/43; 44; 46; 50–73)* (London: SCM Press, 1951); and James A. Durlesser, “A Rhetorical Critical Study of Psalms 19, 42, and 43,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 10 (1980):179–97.

25. See the discussion of the contents and emphases of Book II in the Introduction. See also Laura Joffe, “The Elohist Psalter,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15 (2001):142–66.

and arranged, e.g., concerning the use of the divine name (see the Introduction).

Exegetical Analysis

Summary

Yearning in his soul for restoration to communion with the living God in Zion and lamenting the fact that his adversaries have prevented him, the psalmist encourages himself as he petitions the LORD to vindicate him and lead him back to the temple where he will find spiritual fulfillment and joy.

Outline

- I. The psalmist yearns for communion with the living God as he is taunted by enemies, encouraging himself to hope because he will yet praise him (1–5).
 - A. He longs for communion in the sanctuary with the living God (1–2).
 - B. He explains that he longs for this while enemies taunt him about returning to the feasts (3–4).
 - C. Refrain: He encourages himself to hope because he will yet praise the LORD (5).
- II. The psalmist laments the fact that his enemies have prevented him from returning and caused him grief, but he encourages himself to hope because he will yet praise him (6–11).
 - A. He laments the great sorrows and calamities that have passed over him, prompting his prayer (6–7).
 - B. He finds confidence that the LORD will comfort him day and night (8).
 - C. He vows to call on the LORD to deliver him from his plight at the hands of his enemies who reproach his faith (9–10).
 - D. Refrain: He encourages himself to hope because he will yet praise the LORD (11).
- III. The psalmist petitions the LORD to vindicate him and lead him back to Jerusalem where he longs to be, encouraging himself to hope because he will yet praise him (43:15).

- A. He petitions God to vindicate him and deliver him from the enemies (1).
- B. He petitions God to end his mourning and lead him back to Jerusalem (2–3).
- C. Confident that God heard his petition, he makes his vow of praise (4).
- D. Refrain: He encourages himself to hope because he will yet praise the LORD

COMMENTARY IN EXPOSITORY FORM

I. When separated from the place of worship and taunted for their faith, the truly devout long for the time they can return to the celebration of worship (1–5).

A. They long for refreshing communion with the living God (1–2).

The psalm opens with a moving expression of the believer’s longing to find communion once again with the living God.²⁶ Using emblematic parallelism, the psalmist compares (with a synecdoche) his longing to that of a deer panting for the water brooks. As the water represents the source of life and vitality to the animal, God is his source for spiritual life. The nuance of the verb “pants” (תַּעֲרַג, a progressive imperfect; used only here and Joel 1:20) implies that the panting will continue until the need is satisfied. The picture also implies that just as for the animal in the summer heat when water may be scarce, so too does his spiritual fulfillment seem to have dried up.

His thirst (צָמָאָה נַפְשִׁי, “my soul thirsts”) is spiritual (an implied comparison based on the first verse) because it is a desire for the living God (לְיֵאֱלֹהִים). “Spiritual thirst” can only be satisfied

26. Characteristic of Book II of the collection of psalms is the widespread use of “God” instead of the holy name “Yahweh.” In Book I the holy name was used 272 times and “God” only 15 times; here the numbers are reversed because “God” is used 164 times, and the holy name only 30 times. And in Psalms 42 and 43 God is mentioned 21 times in various ways.

by the living God; every other religious experience is hollow if this is not satisfied. He is the living God, in contrast to all the gods of the pagans—he is not only alive, but he is the source of all life (see Ps. 84:2). It is interesting to note that from all the evidence in this psalm the psalmist was in a place where his natural thirst might be easily satisfied—waterfalls; but that only caused him to think of the greater thirst. By contrast, in Psalm 63:1–2 the psalmist is in the desert which has no water, but even there he thinks primarily of fulfilling his spiritual need by seeing the LORD in the sanctuary.

The second colon of verse 2 explains how the psalmist would satisfy his spiritual desire; he asks, “When shall I come and appear before God?” The verb “appear” (פָּאֵר, “and be seen”) is a common way to express attendance at the sanctuary (Exod. 23:17 and 34:24 legislate that the Israelites were to appear before the LORD as his devout servants three times a year; see also Ps. 84:7). So his desire was to go to the sanctuary, not simply conforming to the letter of the Law but also fulfilling his deepest longing for communion with the living God. His faith was genuine, because his God is the living God.

B. They must endure the taunts of unbelievers (3–4).

In the meantime, the psalmist must endure the taunts of his enemies—enemies of his faith. In this he is an archetype of believers down through the ages who are taunted for their faith. This has caused him tremendous grief, so much so that he says his tears have been his food night and day (see Pss. 80:5 and 102:9; Job 3:24). The line has several figures: “tear” (collective for “tears”) represents his sorrow (a metonymy of effect); “food” compares his sorrow with his daily portion (a metaphor); and “day and night” means all the time (a merism). The cause of his sorrow is their challenging question: “when they say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’” (see Pss. 74:10 and 115:2). The unbelieving world does not understand the faith and is unsympathetic to believers. “Where is your God?” is a rhetorical question, meaning your God does not exist and will not deliver you—it is foolish to believe. For someone who is as devout as the psalmist, this is a painful taunt.

However, the psalmist focuses on past experiences of worshipping the LORD in the sanctuary, and the memory of those things drowns out their taunt and strengthens his faith. He introduces the material with “These things I remember (אֶזְכָּרָה; s. v. Ps. 6:5) and/as I pour out (וַאֲשַׁפְּכֶה) my soul.” The verbs are cohortatives and may be explained in a couple of ways. The first may be taken as a cohortative of resolve, “I will remember,” meaning that he was determined to keep his focus on sanctuary worship.²⁷ Or, it could be taken as a request, “Let me remember.”²⁸ Then, with the two verbs joined by the conjunction, one of them may be subordinated as a temporal clause. It could read, “When I remember these things, then I pour out my soul,” but the conjunction on the second verb may also be interpretive: “I remember these things as I pour out my soul.” His memory of sanctuary worship provides greater inspiration for his prayer. But the juxtaposition of the two verbs shows how joy and sorrow are mingled in his remembering and praying. And rather than simply say “as I pray,” he uses a figurative expression (“pour out,” an implied comparison) to express how his whole spiritual being is given to his prayer. He is spiritually intense: first his soul pants and thirsts for God, and now he pours out his soul, his whole being, to God.

He remembers how he used to go (אָעָבַר, a customary imperfect) with the throng and lead the procession to the house of God. The word “throng” (דָּוָה) occurs only here. It is related to “booth” (דֹּוָה), a dense, interwoven mass like a shelter or a thicket. In fact, the Greek version thought it was “booth” and rendered it “tent.” Here it means a mass of people on their way to the sanctuary. The verb “I used to lead them in procession” (אֶדְרֹהֶם) is difficult. It is a rare form (a hithpael of דָּרַה for הִתְדַרְוֶה with a suffix), occurring here and in Isaiah 38:15, meaning “to move slowly,” as in a slow march or procession. But the suffix is problematic. The verb should be followed by “with them” but not “them,” because it does not mean “lead in procession.” Some propose that if it were read as a piel (and pointed אֶדְרֹהֶם) the meaning would fit: “I used to lead them in procession.” But another solution is

27. Goldingay, *Psalms 41–82*, p. 24.

28. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 229.

to understand the suffix on the verb adverbially and not as the direct object: “I used to go in procession with them.” However the difficulty is resolved, the basic meaning is clear. He recalls his participation with the throng of pilgrims entering the sanctuary.

And it was jubilant: “with the voice of shouting and praising” God (בְּקוֹל־רִנָּה וְתוֹרָה). It is instructive to note that what made it great was the focus on God, not the service itself. The shouting refers to the exuberant singing of the people (s.v. Ps. 33:1); and the praising of God (s.v. Ps. 6:5) refers to the public acknowledgment given for answers to prayer and deliverance from difficulties! The two words may be taken as objective genitives, the voices producing shouts of joy and thanksgiving.²⁹

The last part of the verse clarifies that he was leading “a multitude keeping festival.” The participle “keeping festival” (חֹזְנִים) modifies the “multitude.” The throngs of people were making their pilgrimage to the sanctuary to keep the feasts (the word refers to a sacrificial pilgrimage).

As Kirkpatrick says, these memories were the best antidote to the taunt of the enemies, for the God that he and multitudes of people worshiped with great joy and thanksgiving for past interventions would not abandon him now.³⁰

C. They exhort themselves to hope, knowing they will praise him (5).

This verse records the refrain of Psalms 42 and 43. It is the psalmist’s exhortation of himself to wait on God who will yet deliver him. It provides us with a good example of the way that meditation is most beneficial: based on what they remember, and in contrast to the animosity of the world, believers encourage themselves to a stronger faith with the assurance that they will yet be delivered and return to the sanctuary to praise the LORD.

The self-exhortation has two parts to it, a negative line in which the psalmist rebukes himself for despairing, and a positive line in which he exhorts himself to hope in God whom he

29. They could also be attributive: voices characterized by singing and giving thanks. There is little difference in the meaning of the line.

30. *Psalms*, p. 229.

will yet praise for his deliverance. The rebuke is in the form of a rhetorical question: “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” The verb (הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה, a *hithpael* imperfect of שָׁחָה) indicates that he has been oppressed by others and so is cast down, or bent low in despair. The rebuke exposes the struggle between faith and dejection. The second verb, “and why do you murmur within me?” (וַתִּמְרָמֶר, from תִּמְרָר, “to murmur, growl, be boisterous,” in sequence to the preceding verb), is used figuratively for the discouragement of his soul (a metonymy of adjunct, the inner turmoil being accompanied by disquieting sounds). Psalm 46:3 uses the verb for the raging of the sea, which is illustrative of the sound of his soul being tossed to and fro by the discouraging situation.

Next is the positive encouragement: the psalmist directs his command to himself in order to dispel his despairing feelings. “Hope” (הוֹחֵלֵל; s.v. Ps. 31:24) is an instruction to wait patiently but expectantly for God to work. It is not merely hope against hope, but a solid anticipation of the living God; the hope is anticipation because the power to deliver was not in himself or in others, but in the living God alone. But even a strong faith must at times be accompanied by hope, for faith must wait for God to act.

The reason he calls for hope is “for I shall yet praise him” (כִּי־עוֹד אֶדְבָּר). The hope is that God will intervene; and then the praise will be the public acknowledgment of that intervention (so “I shall praise” would be a metonymy of effect). He recalled how he used to go in procession to the sanctuary to praise the LORD; he fully expects to do that again. Then, after the suffix “him,” he adds, “the salvation of his face” (יְשׁוּעוֹת פָּנָיו). If this Hebrew reading is retained, “the salvation of his face” would mean the “salvation from his (God’s) face.” The word “my God” (אֱלֹהַי) would then begin the next section of the psalm, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me.” Many commentators and translators change “his face” to “my face” to harmonize the wording with the other two refrains. While it would be fine to have the refrain the same in all three places, there is no reason it should be. Moreover, textual critical analysis would indicate the more difficult reading in the Hebrew text is to be preferred. The decision will not change the theological meaning, only the way it is expressed.

Praise for his “salvation” is clear enough (a metonymy of effect, the God who saves him), but why would it be the salvation of “his face”? If it is changed to “my face” referring to the psalmist, then it would refer to the whole person (a synecdoche) but the face will instantly reflect the change. If it is left as “salvation of (from) his face,” then it is a figurative expression (an anthropomorphism) for God’s grace that produces the salvation. In either reading, God will change his lament to praise, and his mourning to joy and gladness.

II. Even though the enemies of God might overwhelm them, the faithful find encouragement in the fact that they will again praise God (6–11).

A. They pour out their complaint to God (6–7).

After the exhortation to hope the psalmist returns to his plight, and the gloom is too deep for him to bear. Whereas he just rebuked himself with “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” he now exclaims, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me.” It is his discouragement and despondency that prompts him to remember the LORD (עֲלֵ-כֵן אֲזַכֵּרְךָ). The verb “remember” most often conveys the idea of acting on what is remembered, so to remember the LORD in this situation means he prays earnestly (s.v. Ps. 6:5).

His location and circumstances are remote. He remembers the LORD “from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.” Mount Hermon is in the far north of Israel, on the border with Syria. The plural ending may emphasize the greatness of the mountain, or it may simply refer to the range with its dominant peaks. Calling this the land of Jordan must then be a reference to the Jordan River, the headwaters of which spring up from under the mountains. Mount Mizar is not known, but probably was a smaller peak (“little one”) in the area. It would not be a reference to Hermon, for the writer would not depreciate the great mountain that way. So the area is identified for us rather clearly: it is the area of ancient Tel Dan, near the base of Hermon, by New Testament Caesarea Philippi.

The psalmist describes his circumstances using the

surrounding imagery: “Deep calls to deep at the roar (sound) of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.” There are waterfalls in the deeper canyons in the area where the water rushes down to form the Jordan.³¹ The word “deep” may refer here to the collections of the water in the pools and along the winding rapids of the Jordan. The word “deep” (תְּהוֹם) usually refers to the depths of the sea and so a place of chaos and death (e.g., Gen. 1:2; 7:11); but here deep calling to deep is associated with the sound of the waterfalls, one roar of water seemingly summoning another. But the use of the word “deep” does give an ominous tone of danger to the description, which would otherwise be a place of refreshment and beauty.

Furthermore, the expression that God’s breakers and waves (rollers) have passed over him signifies that this is a threatening experience and not a pleasant one at all. These expressions are normally used for the waves and currents of the sea (see Jon. 2:3), and so he might have a different referent in mind here than the waterfalls.³² But they could refer to the water rushing over the rocks and down the canyons like a flash flood, equally capable of sweeping people away to their deaths. In either case the psalmist is using the imagery to form the description of his lamentable plight. The language is figurative, but he is not merely comparing the idea of drowning with his present circumstances, for there actually are waterfalls with rushing water in the area. He associates these things with his plight (using metonymy of adjunct): the roaring of the water from one side of the canyon to the other drowns out all other sounds and isolates him from the world outside (the memory of the sound of the festive throng is drowned out by the sound of the waterfalls; and the deeps remind him of how his sorrows and calamities have overwhelmed him. Since the breakers and waves are God’s, then his lament is that it is God who is sending one difficulty after another to him. This kind of water is normally life-giving, which is why the

31. “Waterfall” is צְנוּר, a word used in 2 Samuel 5:8 for a channel with water in it. So here it refers to channels with water in them rushing down from the hills.

32. Kraus says that the image of the torrents of the headwaters of the Jordan and the conception of the chaotic, destructive archetypal flood come together here in the lament (*Psalms 1–59*, p. 440).

deer panted after the water brooks; but water can easily become destructive. Likewise, God, for whom he yearned, was to be his source of life, but if God did not intervene he would be his source of destruction. His circumstances in a remote and possibly dangerous area therefore signify his separation from the sanctuary and his being surrounded by enemies that call out to taunt his faith.³³

B. They are confident that the LORD will comfort them (8).

In spite of all this, the psalmist keeps asserting his faith. The experience of his faith is constant, by day and at night (the merism indicating all the time). The description first states what God does: he commands his “loyal love” (s.v. Ps. 23:6). Here loyal love signifies what that loyal love does (so a metonymy of cause)—it protects and provides for him. He may be in danger, but God extends his loving covenant protection. He sees signs of it each day. Then he states what he does: at night, the time when the isolation and danger might seem most oppressive, he says “his song is with me.” The song is sung by the psalmist and represents his response to the protection (a metonymy of effect); the suffix on the word indicates the source of the song was God. God gave him reason to sing in the darkest hour, and that song according to the next colon is a prayer song (compare Ps. 40:3): “a prayer to the God of my life.” The psalmist became a night singer, no doubt singing his prayer to strengthen his faith and lift his spirits. Other lament psalms grew up in a similar way, and then like this one were deposited in the sanctuary for others to sing when in dangerous situations.

33. Weiser adds that the oppression and scorn of his enemies made him aware of the misery of his separation from God (*Psalms*, p. 348). The picture the psalmist draws is overwhelming in itself, as anyone who has witnessed a flash flood in a canyon would affirm; but it is what it all means that forms the lament: he senses isolation and separation from God as he is attacked by wave after wave of taunting enemies.

C. They pray for the LORD to deliver them from their reproach (9–10).

The words of the prayer are recorded in the next two verses; they reveal the plight of a believer in trouble, who can at one and the same time exhibit strong faith and deep despair. The faith is affirmed first: “my rock” (סֵלֶעִי, an implied comparison) describes God as his strength, security and safety. He never lost faith; if he had he would not have prayed in this way. His lament is then expressed in rhetorical questions. The first is “Why have you forgotten me?” The choice of words is significant for he has been holding fast to his faith by remembering God, but God seems to have forgotten him. As with the word “remember,” the word “forget” also refers to the evidence or result of forgetting—God’s failure to act on his behalf. Theologically one would say that it is impossible for God to forget, for he knows everything equally well (see Psalm 139:1–12). But practically speaking it seems like he forgets, meaning he does not respond (so the verb is a bold anthropomorphism, similar to saying God is sleeping). The effect of God’s failure to act is that the psalmist is suffering, and so his second rhetorical question is, “Why do I go mourning (קָרַר אֲלֵךְ) because of the oppression (לַחַץ) of the enemy?” The verb could be translated “Why should I go?” The point is that he is going mourning, but he should not. He moves about in sadness and grief, with the shadow of death hovering over him because of the oppression of the enemy.³⁴ The word “oppression, distress” is a strong one; it is used for the oppression of Israel in bondage (Exod. 3:9), and of tribes oppressing Israel (Judg. 6:9); and it is used in the expression “bread of oppression,” meaning prison-fare (2 Chron. 18:26). It suggests mistreatment as well as containment.

The oppression is intense because the adversaries reproach (קָרַפוּנִי; s.v. Ps. 22:6) or taunt him about his faith: “Where is your God?” (repeated from verse 3). This rhetorical question is designed to say that his God has abandoned him, or perhaps is unable to deliver him. Their reproach, the psalmist says, is like

34. See Michael L. Barré, “‘Walking About’ as a *Topos* of Depression in Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Bible,” *JNES* 60 (2001):171–87.

a deadly wound in his bones. The expression is literally “with a breaking in my bones” (בְּרִצָּה בְּעַצְמוֹתַי). Perowne says the preposition serves here to introduce a comparison:³⁵ it means it is like a shattering or crushing blow within him (“bones” could be taken as a metonymy of subject, referring to what is inside the boney framework, himself). The effect of their taunt crushes his spirit and takes a toll on his physical body as well. Under their relentless attack, and apparently forsaken by God, he is cast down—and his surroundings remind him of just how isolated he is, and how his voice is drowned out.

D. They exhort themselves to hope, knowing they will praise him (11).

The refrain, however, summons his faith in the LORD, a faith that expects to praise him. This is what devout believers do in such circumstances. The wording of the refrain is the same as verse 5, except for the difficulty at the end. Here it clearly reads “the salvation of my face and my God.” To wait for God means that the whole tension of life is carried by a faith that does not currently see and yet knows that deliverance will come when God draws near to him. And in the sanctuary he will be able to testify that God is his salvation.³⁶

III. Because they are confident that God will vindicate and restore them, the faithful vow to praise the LORD when once again at his altar (43:1–5).

A. They petition God for vindication and deliverance from the wicked (1).

As seen in the outline, Psalm 43 contains two major requests. The first is a prayer for vindication: “Vindicate me (שְׁפַטֵנִי; s.v. Ps. 9:4), O God, and plead my cause (וְרִיבָה לִי; s.v. Ps. 95:8) against an impious nation.” The two imperatives that form this request are complementary: “vindicate” means to “decide a controversy”

35. *Psalms*, I:357.

36. Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 349.

or “make a right judgment.” The psalmist is not asking for judgment because he is guilty (the translation “Judge me” often conveys this idea); rather, he is pleading for the decision that would vindicate him. Such a vindication would not be handed down verbally as if from a court, but through divine intervention that would set things right. The parallel verb means “conduct a legal case,” and the cognate accusative intensifies the action. It is as if there were a court case, and God would contend for his cause. But as the psalm will make clear, the intent of the psalmist’s prayer is that he be delivered from wicked and malicious people who persecute him without a cause. When God does that, he will show the world the justice of the psalmist’s case.

If God resolves the issue by such intervention, the psalmist would be free of any false accusations. Here the outcome may be anticipated by noting the character of the prosecution: “an impious nation” (מְנוּי לֹא־חֹסֵיד). The use of the term “nation” need not imply they are an actual foreign nation; the term can describe a conglomeration of people in an area.³⁷ They may be united by outside influence or pressures rather than internal relationships. The group the psalmist had to deal with was regarded as wicked, the expression here being “not pious.” They have no part in the covenant and no faithfulness to God or his people. They had attempted to carry out their own sentence on the psalmist unjustly and unmercifully. They completely lacked any love (חֶסֶד; s.v. Ps. 23:6), which could have made for fair and just proceedings. Now when the psalmist calls for a righteous decision, he is confident of the result because God commands loyal love for him.

37. The term מְנוּי, “nation,” represents an objective and impersonal conglomerate, usually coordinate with kingdom. The word is never used in personal names, nor with pronominal suffixes, nor with the name Yahweh (the expression is usually יְהוָה יְהוּדָה). So with this word there is no indication of personal ties; it is a large conglomeration of people held together from without rather than within, such as political forces or geography (see E. A. Speiser, “‘People’ and ‘Nation’ of Israel,” *JBL* 79 ([1960]: 157–163). In most places the context will determine the meaning of the word. The word refers frequently to foreign nations, or at least people who do not believe in the LORD. It can refer to people and not nations, such as a group of unbelievers.

The second colon amplifies the description of these people: “Deliver me from the deceitful (בְּזֵדָה; s.v. Ps. 5:7) and unjust (עֲוֹלָה)³⁸ man.” The verb (הִפְלִיטֵנִי) is an imperfect of injunction, equivalent in force to the imperatives of the first half. The verb means “escape,” but in this causative verbal system (piel) it changes to “bring to safety, deliver” (s.v. Ps. 37:20). The psalmist’s call for God to vindicate him is therefore a request for God to rescue him from people who are deceitful and unjust—a clear description of those who live apart from God and his covenant love. The description of the enemy as a single “deceitful and unjust man” could be taken in one of two ways: either he is individualizing the character of his enemies, or he is alluding specifically

38. עֲוֹלָה means “injustice, unrighteousness, wrong.” It has approximately three categories of meanings, although there may be some overlap. First, it is used for violent deeds of injustice. In the Davidic Covenant God promises that no unjust man will oppress the servant of the LORD (2 Sam. 7:10). People who unjustly oppress others are called “sons of the unjust” (Ps. 89:22). It is also a designation for the wicked who plan unjust acts in their hearts (Ps. 58:2). And the psalmist asserts that wicked government will not be so severe as to cause the righteous to get involved in such unrighteousness (Ps. 125:3). An unjust man such as is mentioned in Psalm 43:1 is essentially a lawless person.

A second category focuses on unjust speech. Malachi tells how the original priests taught the truth and not unjust things, false teachings that would cause people to stumble (Mal. 2:6). Isaiah speaks of the tongue that utters wicked things (59:3). And Psalm 107:42 anticipates how these unjust people will shut their mouths.

A third category is the meaning of injustice in general. Psalm 64:6 refers to people who plot injustice, but this does not say much about the exact meaning. More helpful is Job 6:29, where Job tells his friends to stop being unjust—what they were saying was not right. Ezekiel 28 refers to the anointed cherub who was perfect in all his ways until evil (עֲוֹלָתָהּ) was found in him (v. 15).

There are other related words that help clarify the meaning. The noun עֲוֹל is “an unjust one.” It describes oppressive rulers by contrasting the LORD’s reign that will have no wrong/injustice (Zeph. 3:5). Another noun (עֲוָלָה) also means “injustice”; it refers to the miscarriage of justice by unjust judges in Psalm 82:2. Psalm 7:3 uses this word in the protestation of innocence where the psalmist claims there is no injustice in his hands.

So these words refer to wicked acts and words that are unjust or wrong. The unjust person in view is not harmless—he oppresses people and perverts justice. Leviticus 19:15 warns: “do not do injustice” (עֲוָלָה).

to one person who may have been the leader. The second option seems logical since there would have been someone driving the opposition, but the parallelism with “people” suggests the other.

B. They petition God to end their mourning by leading them to the sanctuary (2–3).

1. They lament that their God seems to have rejected them (2).

In the next verse we see that the appeal is urgent because God seems to have abandoned him. Others in the faith have felt this, and they too offer such a lament. The psalmist begins the verse by setting forth the grounds for his appeal; it is a statement of his faith: “For you are the God of my safety.” The initial “For you (כִּי־אַתָּה)” marks a confident change of thought to one of faith, but that faith will be seen in conflict by the predicament. So the petition stops for the moment as the psalmist affirms that God is the God of his safety (the genitive “safety” in “my safety” [מְעוּנִי] may be taken as an objective genitive, designating God as the one who makes him safe). But this statement of confidence amplifies the dilemma. If God is his safety, why then does he feel rejected, and why should he go about mourning? The verb “you have rejected me” (רָפָהּ־נִי) in the first question is a present perfect because he still feels the continuing results of God’s failure to deliver him. The question is rhetorical; he is lamenting that God must have rejected him because his prayer has not been answered.³⁹ He felt that his enemies were prevailing over him because God was rejecting him as if he were to be avoided.

And the result of the absence of divine intervention is expressed in the second rhetorical question, “Why do I go about

39. The verb רָפָהּ is a strong one. Some scholars link it to a cognate in Arabic that has the sense of “repelled” because of becoming rancid, or stinking, so that the meaning came to refer to a turning away from something loathsome. But that connection may be to a second verb and not this one. רָפָהּ means “reject, spurn”; it is used in contexts where the people reject God for other gods, or where God rejects Israel because of idolatry. For a suggestion of a meaning “to be angry,” see Reuven Yaron, “The Meaning of *zānah*,” *VT* 13 (1963):237–9.

mourning . . . ?” The verb “go about” (אָתְּהַלֵּךְ; earlier in verse 9 it was אָלַךְ) may express deliberation in the question: “Why should I go about?” And the use of this verbal stem (*hithpael*) stresses it was a continual moving about, going back and forth. Delitzsch says in this psalm it describes “the slow deliberate gait of one who is lost in his own thoughts and feelings. The sting of his pain is the distance from the sanctuary of his God.”⁴⁰ The verb is preceded here also by the participle (קָדַר) from the verb meaning “be dark,” perhaps reflecting the darkened countenance of a mourner. The participle is modifying the verb, telling in what way he was going about. And the cause of all this was the oppression of the enemy, as the preposition makes clear: “under/ because of the oppression of the enemy” (בְּלַחַץ אוֹיֵב).

So the psalmist knew that what the enemies were doing to him caused him to mourn and cry out to God. But he was confused by his plight because God was not responding to give him safety. And yet he did not waver in affirming his faith that God was his safety.

2. They pray for God to guide them back to the sanctuary
(3).

Believers pray not just for deliverance but for the outcome of it all in the sanctuary. The psalmist’s first request was for God to vindicate him by delivering him from enemies who were ruining his life. Now he appeals to God to guide him to the proper place. The imperative “send out” (שְׁלַח), stressing immediate action, is a request since it forms the prayer. It is for God to send out his light (אוֹר) and truth (אֱמֶת; s.v. Ps. 15:2). “Truth” refers to that which is reliable and dependable, such as the word of the LORD; it is figurative here, perhaps referring to revelation, or to God’s faithfulness to fulfill his word. “Light” (an implied comparison) often represents life, joy, salvation, truth or the light of God’s face which is mercy. There are several possible interpretations of these words in this psalm. Perowne suggests an allusion to the Urim and Thummim as the symbols of light and truth.⁴¹ Calvin views the light as denoting favor from God which dis-

40. *Psalms*, II:61.

41. *Psalms*, I:346.

pels the thick obscurity that overwhelms in the time of sorrow.⁴² Delitzsch suggests that they refer to mercy and truth.⁴³ What we can say is that light dispels the darkness; and in this passage it might answer to the darkness of the mourning of life under oppression; and truth opposes the lying taunts of enemies and reveals God’s faithful promises. Therefore, in praying for God’s light the psalmist would be praying for a joyful deliverance from the oppression, and in adding the petition for truth he would be praying that God’s deliverance would demonstrate his faithfulness and respond to their taunting question, “Where is your God?” The illumination would be salvific; and the “truth” would reveal his just cause. The psalmist had been falsely accused—he needed truth; he had been oppressed and went about in the sorrow of mourning—he needed light. Both images ultimately signify divine deliverance that will vindicate. When God sends out his light and truth, the psalmist will be free to go to the holy city.

The “light” and “truth” become then the subjects of the verbs: “let them lead me” and “let them bring me back” to the holy mountain and the tabernacle. God’s illumination will show him the way of escape and the way of return to Jerusalem; and God’s truth will vindicate him and set him free to go. The two verbs are best taken as jussives, continuing the prayer, although they could be taken as imperfect tenses expressing his confidence that they will lead him and restore him to Zion. But the change from petition to confidence comes with the next verse in which the psalmist vows what he will do when he gets there.

The verb “lead” (לָקַח; s.v. Ps. 23:3) may be used for leading or guiding in general, but here the direction is to the holy mountain where the tabernacle⁴⁴ of the LORD was located. The mountain upon which this shrine was located is called “holy” because it was the dwelling-place of the LORD among his people (for “holy” s.v. Ps. 22:3).

42. *Book of Psalms*, II:146.

43. *Psalms*, II:61.

44. The word is plural, “your tabernacles,” but clearly refers to the sanctuary. This plural (as with others, such as the “day of atonement[s]”) may be in the plural to encompass the several parts, or it may be a plural of amplification.

***C. They vow to praise God in the sanctuary with music
(4).***

Strong believers will plan their praises even when praying. Here the psalmist vows to praise God when he arrives at the sanctuary. The declaration of the LORD's deliverance is the substance of the vow that he will pay with the sacrifice of praise; but vowing to praise beforehand is also a way of motivating God to answer his prayer—giving God a reason. If God wants him to praise, then God will need to give him the reason to praise, that is, deliver him. But by making this vow the psalmist is actually expressing his confidence that God will answer the petition. The determination is expressed by the cohortatives “I will go” and “I will praise.” He is promising a celebration in the sanctuary with sacrifice and praise for the deliverance. He will go to the altar of God, the high altar in the courtyard which was the place of sacrifice (מִזְבֵּחַ), but in doing so he says he will actually be going to God. In general, sacrificial ritual was the way to God; but because of his vow, here he describes God in terms of praise: he is the “gladness of my rejoicing (שִׂמְחַת יְלִי).” “Gladness” (s.v. Ps. 48:11) is in apposition to “God”; and “rejoicing” (s.v. Ps. 13:4) functions like a superlative genitive asserting that the gladness is joyful gladness. These figures portraying God as his greatest joy emphasize that God is at the heart of all his joy, its cause and its substance. But when he is separated from God and the celebration in the sanctuary, he goes about mourning.

The second part has “and I will praise you with a harp.”⁴⁵ This line can be left as a second vow, i.e., he will first go to the altar to make the sacrifice, and then he will praise God with music. But it can also be subordinated to the first as a purpose clause: “in order that I may praise you” (again, for יָדָה s.v. Ps. 6:5). And the praise is to be directed to “God, my God.” Others will hear and join in the praise; but God will be praised directly. The repetition of the word in apposition with a pronominal suffix emphasizes his personal relationship to God in the covenant. Therefore he is

45. The harp or lyre (כִּנּוּר) is a stringed instrument used for all types of music. It is listed in 1 Chronicles 15:16 as one of the instruments to be used in praising God.

not filled with common happiness, but with the joy that only a relationship with the living God can bring.

This vow expresses an amazing confidence. The psalmist is still under the oppression of the enemy, but he is making plans for what he will do and say when he returns to the sanctuary. He knows in his heart that God has heard his prayer—that is the basis of his confident vow.

D. They exhort themselves to hope, knowing they will praise him (5).

The refrain now occurs for the third time, reiterating the determination to hope in God and the expectation to praise him.

MESSAGE AND APPLICATION

Here we have the intense longing of a believer for communion with the living God in the sanctuary. The theme may not resonate with people right away, because many do not share this urgent need or desire. Unfortunately, there are other places they would desire to be as well. But in these two psalms we have the longing of someone who truly loved to worship the LORD in the sanctuary with great celebration; that in itself would be reason enough to long to be there. But he was separated from the sanctuary by very unpleasant circumstances and felt overwhelmed by his enemies who taunted his faith. He wanted to be in the sanctuary praising God with the other worshipers, for his deliverance from his distress would be a vindication of his faith.

The movement of the message through the three stanzas lays out the lament and the petition. At first he explains that he is separated from the sanctuary and taunted for his faith; then he tells how enemies have overwhelmed him and caused him grief even though he is sure of God's love; and finally he prays for vindication, that God would lead him back to the altar. What must be emphasized in the exposition is the refrain: three times he exhorts himself not to be downcast but to keep hoping, for he knows that he will yet praise the LORD. Often believers can encourage one another in the faith, but in their meditations they must also remind themselves of God's love and care.

Yearning for God

The expository idea of Psalms 42 and 43 can be expressed in this way: *Devout believers who find themselves separated from the sanctuary and overwhelmed by enemies of the faith long to be in the sanctuary praising God for his saving acts.* I used “devout believers” because the psalmist clearly represents the kind of believer who loves to worship the LORD. If the worship is glorious and meaningful, and worshipers are committed to the LORD, their desire to be in the sanctuary will be as strong as it was for the psalmist—especially if being there strengthens and confirms their faith in a world that is antagonistic to it. Believers today have to recapture this spirit. This they will begin to do by their spiritual meditations. And leaders of the Church have to strive to make the service in the sanctuary such a life-changing and glorious experience that people will long to be there.

But in the New Testament the greatest longing of those who are spiritual is to be in the heavenly sanctuary with the Lord, for that will be the great and lasting vindication of the faith. Paul said he would rather be at home with the Lord—but whether there or here, he would try to please the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8–9). And Paul certainly knew what it meant to be persecuted for his faith. But the marvelous part of the desire to be in the heavenly sanctuary is that the Lord Jesus Christ desires that we be there with him, to see his glory (John 14:3; 17:24). Throughout the history of the faith believers have desired to go to the sanctuary to see the LORD (see Ps. 63); in Christ Jesus that desire will be fulfilled gloriously.