

of confidence is for the healing that would come, even though it was not yet experienced at the time the words were offered. But the degree of confidence is clear in v 13b: the sick person was confident that he would "stand in (God's) presence," referring specifically to future visits to the temple for worship, but generally to the survival in life beyond the threat of death which had come so close. On v 14, see *Form/Structure/Setting* (above).

Explanation

For general reflections on the *psalms of sickness*, see particularly the *Explanation* at Pss 6 and 38.

In John's Gospel (13:18), the lamenting words of the psalmist concerning betrayal by an intimate friend are used by Jesus in anticipation of his own betrayal. Thus, words which were originally part of a liturgy of sickness in the face of death, are transformed into what amounts to a prophetic prediction of betrayal in the life of Jesus. This quotation of the psalm in the NT is a further illustration of the manner in which the evangelists have set forth their passion narratives in the context of what is, in effect, a liturgy of dying, as was so evident in the NT quotation of Ps 22 (see above).

BOOK II: PSALMS 42-72

The Lament of an Individual (42-43)

Bibliography

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Translation (Psalm 42)

(Note: Psalms 42 and 43 are interpreted as a single psalm. For convenience, the translations, notes, and comments are given separately, in the normal fashion. The section entitled *Form/Structure/Setting*, below, covers both psalms, as does the *Explanation*, following the *Comment* on Ps 43.)

- ¹ For the musical director. A *Maskil*^a for the sons of Korah.^b
- ²⁽¹⁾ As a deer^a longs for streams of water, (4+4)
so does my soul long for you, O God.
- ³⁽²⁾ My soul thirsts for God, the God of life; (5+5)
when may I enter and see^a the face of God?
- ⁴⁽³⁾ My tears were my food by day and night (5+5)
when they^a said to me all day long: "Where is your God?"
- ⁵⁽⁴⁾ Let me remember these things (2+2?)
and let me pour out my soul,
how I used to cross with the multitude, (3+3)
I used to walk^a with them to God's house, (3+2)
with the sound of shouting and thanksgiving,
amid the pilgrim crowd.
- ⁶⁽⁵⁾ O my soul, why are you downcast (2+2)
and so disturbed within me?
Wait patiently for God, for I will praise him again, (4+3)
the victories of my God's presence.^a
- ⁷⁽⁶⁾ My soul is downcast within me; (3+2)
therefore, I will remember you
from the land of Jordan and the Hermon range, (3+2)
from the mountain of Mizar.^a
- ⁸⁽⁷⁾ Deep is calling to deep, (3+2)
to the clamor of your cataracts.
All your breakers and waves (3+2)
have swept over me.

- ^{9(b)} *By day, the Lord commands his lovingkindness,
and by night, his^a song is with me,
a prayer to the^b Living God.* (4+3+3)
- ¹⁰⁽⁹⁾ *I say to God, my Rock:* (3+2)
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk in darkness
because of an enemy's oppression?" (3+2)
- ¹¹⁽¹⁰⁾ *With a breaking^a in my bones,
my foes taunted me,
by saying to me all day long:* (2+2)
"Where is your God?" (3+2)
- ¹²⁽¹¹⁾ *O my soul, why are you downcast
and why are you so disturbed within me?
Wait patiently for God, for I will praise him again,
the victories of my God's presence.* (2+2) (4+3)

Notes

1.a. On the meaning of *Mashil*, see Ps 32:1, note a.

1.b. On psalms associated with the sons of Korah, see THE COMPILATION OF THE PSALTER in the INTRODUCTION.

2.a. For MT's ל'ר ("hart, stag"), the more normal form ל'ר ("deer") is read, the ל' apparently having been omitted (haplography). There may be a parallel to this line in the Ugaritic texts with respect to general poetic imagery (CTA 5.i.16-17; CML², 68), though see the cautionary remarks of Donner (art. cit.) with respect to the meaning of Ugaritic *'ayll*.

3.a. The verb is pointed in MT as Niphal ("be seen (by) the face of God"); the pointing, which is grammatically difficult, presumably reflects the imposition of later orthodoxy, unhappy with the implication that God's face could actually be seen. But this is poetry, not dogmatic theology: the Qal (as in the translation) is more natural grammatically and has the support of some Heb. mss (De-Rossi, IV, 28).

4.a. Reading ב'אמ' (De-Rossi, IV, 28, four Heb. mss): cf. v 11.

5.a. MT's מ'ר' is interpreted as Hithp. of מ'ר' "move slowly" (cf. BDB). Dahood interprets the term as derived from מ'ר', "to bow down, prostrate" (*Psalms I*, 257), making his claim principally on the basis of Ugaritic. He cites the form *ydd* (*ndd*) in *UT 76* (CTA 10).ii.17-18 and *UT 51* (CTA 4).iii.11-12. But the supposed Ugaritic evidence is a highly uncertain basis upon which to propose a Heb. verb meaning "bow down." First, there is the problem of the root form of Ugaritic *ydd* in the two texts cited. Gibson, *CML*², 145, identifies the form in each case to be *dwd* ("stood up"). But even if one grants that the root form is *ndd*, as is likely, it remains likely that *ndd* means "hasten, run" (cf. Arabic *nadda*); this sense is given in the translation of Caquot, et. al., *Textes ougaritiques I*, 200, 284 (cf. Driver, *CML*, 157; Gordon, *UT*, #1615).

6.a. Reading מ'ר' א'ל' (cf. v 12), taking the first word of v 7 as belonging to v 6.

7.a. On the sense of the geographical terms in this verse, see the *Comment*. Dahood (*Psalms I*, 258-59) renders MT's מ'ר' צ'ר' as מ'ר' צ'ר' (and then, on the assumption of metathesis, renders מ'ר' צ'ר' as מ'ר' צ'ר'), translating "mountains at the rim" (viz. of the netherworld). The principal basis for the suggestion is Ugaritic *gšr* in *UT 51.viii.4-8* (=CTA 4), which, he claims, means "edge, rim." But, for three reasons, the Ugaritic basis of the proposal should probably be rejected: (1) Ugaritic *gšr* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Ugaritic texts, and is naturally of uncertain meaning (as Dahood admits); (2) an equally probable sense of the term is "ruler" (in context, "ruler of the world"); see M. Tsevat, "Sun Mountains at Ugarit," *JNWSL* 3 (1974) 73; (3) apart from all the difficulties with the Ugaritic term, the assumption that metathesis has occurred in the Hebrew term weakens the case still further.

9.a. On the variant form of the suffix in מ'ר' א'ל', see Tournay (art. cit.).

9.b. MT has "my living God," but many Heb. mss omit the suffix (De-Rossi, IV, 29).

11.a. On the nuance "break, crush," for the verb מ'ר' (by analogy with Akkadian terminology), see Waldman, art. cit., 548-49. An alternative, though less likely solution, is to emend to מ'ר' א'ל', "with a dagger in my bones. . .," as proposed by Leveen (art. cit., 57).

Form/Structure/Setting

There is extensive agreement among the majority of interpreters that Pss 42 and 43 should be interpreted as a single psalm, for the following reasons: (a) many Heb. mss present the psalms as a single unit; (b) Ps 43 has no title, which is surprising in Book II of the Psalter; and (c) they are joined by a common refrain (42:6, 12; 43:5). The reason for the separation into the two extant units is not known; it may originate with G, which provides a title for Ps 43 ("a psalm of David"), which in turn may have reflected an interpretation of the distinction between *lament* (Ps 42) and *prayer* (Ps 43). If the division of the original psalm was as early as G, then it is also the case that the unity (after the division) was recognized from an early period, at least as early as the time of Eusebius (cf. Alonso-Schökel, *JSOT* 1 [1976] 4).

With respect to form, Pss 42-43 is an *individual lament*. Although it is possible to interpret the psalm as *national lament*, taking the "I" to represent the nation (cf. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, I, 219), or as a *royal lament*, dealing with the plight of the king (Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 69-71), the evidence for such views is slender. It is more probable that the psalm should be interpreted in the conventional sense of *individual*, reflecting the spiritual plight of a particular, but unknown person. The precise background to the lament is also uncertain. It might be that of one in the Exile, or of one cut off from this homeland while the royal cult still flourished. But it is equally possible that the background is to be found in sickness, which limited the poet's possibility of going to Jerusalem and participating in the worship in the temple.

The structure of the psalm falls into three sections, each concluded with a refrain, which provides the overall framework for the psalm.

- | | |
|------------|----------------------|
| 1. 42:2-6 | (a) Lament (vv 2-5) |
| | (b) Refrain (v 6) |
| 2. 42:7-12 | (a) Lament (vv 7-11) |
| | (b) Refrain (v 12) |
| 3. 43:1-5 | (a) Prayer (vv 1-4) |
| | (b) Refrain (v 5) |

At first impression, the framework of refrain may appear to give a static quality to the psalm as a whole, but in reality it provides the context for movement from near despair to surging confidence. After each lament, the refrain recalls the possibility of future praise, and in the prayer of the third part of the psalm, the movement occurs which begins to make the possibility a reality.

The psalm should probably not be associated directly with Israel's cultic life. Indeed, the nostalgia for worship (42:5) and the hope of future participa-

tion in the temple's worship (43:4) strongly imply that his individual lament should be interpreted in a noncultic fashion. If the psalm were late and a product of the Diaspora, its use would have been entirely appropriate to a worshiping community, but there can be no certainty as to the psalm's background, and as a consequence its original setting remains unknown.

Comment

Lament and refrain (42:2-6). The psalmist begins to describe his plight with a simile drawn from nature, to convey powerfully his spiritual *thirst*. Imagining the dry steppe country, the poet envisages a deer thirsty for water; though the simile focuses on the deer, it is the *water* which is to be one of the principal poetic motifs running throughout the psalm. Like a thirsty animal in a dry place, the psalmist thirsts for God, but it is specifically the worship of God in the temple for which he longs (as is implied by "the face," or presence, of God: v 3b). The opening simile is converted into a metaphor in v 4, linked by the motif of water; the one who longed for a refreshing drink, tasted instead the bitter water of tears. The question posed to the psalmist, "Where is your God?" (v 4; see also v 11), could perhaps be taken to imply the Exile, where it must have seemed that God had deserted his people. But the more immediate sense is provided by any context of despair; in sickness or in trouble, it seemed both to the psalmist and to his enemies that God had departed (cf. Ps 22:2). Feeling deserted by God, and cut off from the joy of participating in the temple's worship, the psalmist determines to remember better times (v 5). He determines to think back to the times when, amid the great crowds of pilgrims, he had gone to Jerusalem to participate in the festivals of worship. But a forced nostalgia is no substitute for reality, and the first occurrence of the refrain (v 6) merely emphasizes the depth of his plight. At this stage in the psalm, it is the first part of the refrain which dominates (v 6a-b), while the second part (v. 6c-d) remains a distant hope. The psalmist is still downcast and the praise is distant.

Second lament and refrain (42:7-12). The second lament begins with the words of the refrain and develops them further. Recognizing that he is still "downcast" (v 7a), the psalmist determines once again to draw on the resources of memory. But now, rather than remembering the pilgrim crowds and festivals (as in v 5), he determines to remember God. The action is significant; at the heart of the psalmist's predicament is an awareness of the absence of God, and through the tool of memory he is determined to attempt to dispel that sense of absence and distance. The geographical references that follow are difficult to interpret; they may refer to the psalmist's homeland (the hills of Hermon, the source of the Jordan, and the unknown Mt. Mizar), or they may be terms which imply the whole land, or places visited by the psalmist during the course of a lifetime. But in either case, they must be interpreted in the context of the psalmist's attempt to harness his memory toward the resolution of his plight. He is deliberately thinking of those places in which, in one fashion or another, he had known and experienced the presence of God; the memories should dispel the sense of wilderness and dryness evoked in vv 2-3. But the attempt to harness memory is unsuccessful;

as he thinks of the great mountain range, whose western flank is lapped by the ocean, with the streams of the Jordan rising in the east, it is only the springs of chaos and despair which are released in his mind. Now the motif of water (vv 2-3) is reversed. He longed for water in thirst, but thinking of the waters of the ocean and those of the river, it is their waves and waterfalls that dominate his mind, like one chaotic deep calling to another (v 8a). He had longed for the waters of refreshment, but somehow in the effort to remember God, he had unleashed the primeval waters of chaos, which seemed to depict so powerfully his terrible situation.

Verse 9 is difficult to interpret, appearing at first to be out of context, but again it must be interpreted in the light of the determination to exercise memory (v 7). What he could remember in a literal sense was the good old days reflected in the words of v 9, when his relationship with God had been healthy and characterized by the orderly experience of God's lovingkindness. That was the literal memory he called to mind, but in the mental image, it was jaundiced and twisted by the reality of his present situation. Things had been good, but what could that mean when since then he had been overwhelmed by the divine waves (v 8) and now had to walk in darkness, apparently forgotten by God but remembered well enough by his enemies (v 10)? Thus vv 10-11 demonstrate the awful situation to which the psalmist was reduced by his exercise of memory; as he remembered, he could only conclude that God had forgotten. For though he used to know God's lovingkindness (v 9), now he knew only the taunting of enemies (v 11). The psalmist has not yet escaped his lament, and the repeated question, "Where is your God?" (v 11, cf. v 4) only reinforces the present depth of his distress. And so the refrain comes again (v 12) and drolls a kind of epitaph on the possibility of deliverance through memory. For twice the psalmist had remembered, and still he was *downcast* (v 12a), the latter part of the refrain offering only a hope that was as elusive as before.

Translation (Ps 43)

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| ¹ Judge me, O God,
and plead my case
against a loveless people.
From deceitful people
and the unrighteous, rescue me. | (2+2+2)

(2+2) |
| ² For you are the God of my stronghold;
why have you rejected me?
Why must I wander about in darkness,
because of an enemy's oppression? | (3+2)

(3+2) |
| ³ Send your light and your truth.
They shall guide me; ^a
they shall bring me to your holy mountain
and to your dwelling place. ^b | (3+2)

(3+2) |
| ⁴ And let me go into God's altar,
to the God of my ^a gladness. | (3+2) |

- I will rejoice^b and praise you on a lyre,
O God, my God.^c* (3+2)
- ⁵ *O my soul, why are you downcast
and why so disturbed within me?* (2+2)
- Wait patiently for God, for I will praise him again,
the victories of my God's presence.^a* (4+3)

Notes

3.a. Alternatively, נַחֲמוּנִי could be read (with the support of a few Heb. mss and S): "they shall comfort me."

3.b. The plural form of the Hebrew noun should probably be taken as an intensive plural, indicating the sanctity of the place.

4.a. נַחֲמוּנִי is read, with the addition of the pronominal suffix; MT's pointing, linking the term with following נַחֲמוּנִי upsets the metrical (*qinah*) balance. See Brockington, *The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament*, 129.

4.b. For נַחֲמוּנִי ("my rejoicing"), נַחֲמוּנִי ("I will rejoice") is read; cf. Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, 472.

4.c. The expression "O God, my God" is the Elohistic version of the more familiar "O Lord, my God" (e.g. Ps 7:2). Ps 42 is the first psalm in the so-called "Elohistic Psalter" (Pss 42-83); see THE COMPILATION OF THE PSALTER in the INTRODUCTION.

5.a. On the reading presupposed by this translation, see note a at Ps 42:6.

Comment

Prayer and refrain (43:1-5). The lament of the two preceding sections of the psalm is now converted into a prayer, and the form of the transition is striking. In the lament sections, the psalmist is introverted, dwelling on memory and trying to summon it to his aid; for practical purposes, he is talking to himself. But now, in this section of the psalm, the internal dialogue of lament is turned into an external dialogue with God. And the change from introverted reflection to external plea is the beginning of real progress for the psalmist; he has already learned that there is no help to be found in the weak ally of memory, and aid must come directly from God.

First, he turns in prayer to the enemies (vv 2-3) who were so significant in his lament (42:4, 10, 11). Rather than merely lamenting their enmity, he asks God to act as his defense counsel and to take up his case. The nature of the enemies is no more specific here than in the earlier portions of the text. While the reference to "people" (v 1) might imply "nation," and hence be indicative of a king's foe, the parallelism of v 1 (the "deceitful" and "unrighteous") indicates that the verse refers simply to enemies in general. While there is still the thread of lament running through the prayer (v 2c-d is almost identical to 42:10c-d), the lament is subsumed within the purpose of the prayer, namely the plea for rescue. The conversion process of prayer is seen most clearly in the petition that God "send light and truth" (v 3); while there was no escape from "darkness" in 42:10, now the light is asked for to dispel the darkness of inimical oppression. Light would bring the psalmist out of darkness and into the divine presence in the temple, here symbolized by the "holy mountain" and divine "dwelling place." Again, the

way in which prayer converts lament can be observed, for in 42:5 God's temple had been merely the object of nostalgic remembrance; now it comes closer to the reality of experience in the prayer addressed to the living God. In v 4, the prayer and the confidence that it will be answered are finally fused. "Let me go in," he prays, but then confidence outstrips petition as he states: "I will rejoice. . . ."

It is the transformation of the prayer, and specifically the transition that takes place in v 4, that finally changes even the refrain, despite the fact that the words remain the same. For in the laments and their culmination in refrain, it was inevitable that the accent fall on the first part of the refrain, namely the "downcast soul," because those lines reflect precisely the internal dialogue between a person and his soul from which there was no liberation. While the dialogue remained within, the possibility of praise remained without. But the prayer has changed that; the situation creating sorrow still exists, but as the question is asked again, "why are you downcast?", the response can now be given with the conviction that God has heard and answered his prayer.

Explanation

It is characteristic of the human condition, that in health and happy times it is easier to be outgoing and positive in one's view of life than it is in times of distress. The situation is clearly exemplified in the religion of ancient Egypt, which was for the most part a religion characterized by a cheerful view of this life and a positive view of the life beyond. But there is a remarkable text which has survived from the second millennium B.C., giving a deeper insight into the human psyche: it is commonly entitled a "Dispute over Suicide" (*ANET*, 405-7). A man engages in a dialogue with his own soul. He suggests to his soul that the miseries of life are such that suicide seems attractive, but his soul has an equally gloomy view of death and sees no solution in suicide. The text (as it has survived) contains no solution to the problem of the dialogue, but its very existence is a testimony to an experience which was common not only in the biblical world, but also in our modern world: despair. Despair destroys the positive, outgoing view of life and turns a person in upon himself. As in ancient Egypt, so in Pss 42-43, the literary form by which expression is given to the sense of despair and lament over life is the dialogue between a person and his soul. And the literary form is rooted in a human reality, the psychological tendency toward introversion that is created by external pressures.

But while the basic structure of the psalm, and notably its refrain, is that of dialogue between a person and his soul, the latter part of the text (Ps 43) breaks the literary bind by bringing a third person into the "dialogue." When the psalmist stops speaking to himself (Ps 42) and addresses his words to God (Ps 43), the beginning of his deliverance is in sight. And again, the literary structure may reveal the solution for reality; when one turns from the memories and burdens within the mind and boldly addresses to God a plea for deliverance, the first step is taken on the path that leads ultimately to a restoration of the life of praise and to mental and spiritual health.