

GROANING TO WORSHIP: DESPAIR OF THE BELIEVER OVER THE DESERTION OF GOD

By Dante Spencer

Scripture, being the verbal revelation of God, requires the engagement of the mind in order for us to profit from it. Reading Scripture with its history, prophecy, poetry, and theology is an intellectual endeavor. But there is more to it than this. Because Scripture is the word of God, it must be heard with faith (Heb 4:2), a faith that is itself born of and continues to be nourished by this revelation (Rom 10:17). That is to say, Scripture requires us to read it with our heart. This is because Scripture's history, poetry, and prophecy all reveal our Creator and Redeemer. Scripture does not come to us as academic theology, it concerns the Son of God who died and rose to forgive sinners. The gospel calls for faith in Christ which, when embraced with the heart, issues in love for God that seeks to know him through his word (1 Pet 1:23—2:3). In other words, entering into the covenant bond with God as the King through faith brings one into communion with Christ (Jn 14:23; 15:14; 1 Cor 1:9). This covenant fellowship is what we have in the Psalms and is one of the reasons why the Psalms are the most frequently quoted book in the NT. It is also a reason why they played such a prominent role in the French Reformation.¹

The Psalms contain the revelation of God in the midst of chronicling the pilgrimage of the believer – worship, persecution from foes, confusion over providence, hope, anger at the wicked, spiritual depression, and confession of sin. In the Psalms we learn about God and even ourselves. We have the knowledge of God along with the anatomy of the godly soul. The seed of the woman is worshipping their God. In worship we grow in our knowledge of God and as the ones in prayer and worship, we also learn about our own hearts. Though writing specifically about our corruption in light of God's holiness, Calvin recognized this profundity and opened his *Institutes* with this reality: without the knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God and without the knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.²

The historical works of Yahweh, the prophetic word of Christ (cf. Col 3:16), and the worship of the true and living God in the Psalms can truly be understood only when the reader shares in the psalmist's life in the covenant of grace. The

¹ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, tr. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 172. Of course a major reason why the Psalms were crucial was because Calvin's chief endeavor was to reform worship (see "The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church," *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, tr. Henry Beveridge [Edinburgh: Calvin Tract Society, 1844], 3:260).

² *Inst.* I.i.1-3.

psalms could not have been written apart from the tremendous wrestling with God and turmoil of various sorts – battling those who hate him, conviction of sin, perplexity over God’s goodness and presence. Yet we cannot separate God’s acts from his nature. Indeed, redemptive history is the foundation of the psalmists’ devotion (see Pss 106; 136). The Psalms are the subjective expression of an objective faith in the transcendent and immanent God of Israel (113:4-9) who reigns in majesty over not only his own people, but all nations (47:8; 93:1; 96:10; 103:19). They were forged out of the life of faith, not in the arid halls of speculative, abstract and, consequently, fruitless medieval scholasticism that Calvin so despised.³ To name but a few, Pss 3—13, 38, 73, and 109 are all superb examples of this dynamic. To this list Ps 42—43 can be added. One must suffer the agony of spiritual desertion to appreciate the lament of the psalmist. He must not read (sing) only with the head but with the heart as well because these psalms tell of the sorrow a member of the covenant experiences when he is not able to worship his God as he once had. In a word, we must *feel* the psalm in order to rightly sing this word of God to God. As the psalmist exhorts us elsewhere, “Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us” (62:8). The Psalms express the character of his God in the midst of the believer opening his heart. The Psalms were not composed by men who were emotionally detached. They were not calmly written while sitting in a leather chair as the poet enjoyed his pipe. Nor should the exegete read them that way! They were interrupted by times of introspection and outbursts of tears to the point of trembling and feeling ill. There was no pen gliding smoothly along the paper. And as he wrote and meditated on God, the Spirit worked in him, nurturing his faith and giving him a heavenly perspective. For this reason the Psalms are Scripture’s holy of holies.

Excursus

In the beginning of 1995 when I was 10 years old in the Lord, and continuing on through into 1998, I suffered spiritual depression. I cannot convey how bad it was; it was simply the worst time of my life. I had been at a church with wonderful worship from 1991 to 1994. It was a period of tremendous edification during which I came to see the sermon as not only being a means of teaching, but as an act of worship. The entire worship service is worship. I learned that theology is doxological and is meant to be the rule that naturally determines how we worship. From this encouraging setting I came into a church where the service was a mess on numerous fronts. Week by week, month after month, this weighed heavy upon me until I was finally drained. In place of the psalmist’s enemies who mocked him, I had an oppressive ‘pastor’ who falsely accused me

³ E.g., *Inst.* I.xiv.4. Yet the Psalms are such that Luther could rightly consider the Psalter to be “a book for the greatest and holiest theologians” (Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1959], 2:999). The Psalms are simultaneously devotional and theological; they are doxological theology which is the best kind of theology.

of various failures of character. Like an ambassador of Satan from Job, this pastor took the place of Christ as head of the sheep. I could feel my joy and zeal diminish until I was a shadow of what I once was. As far as I am concerned, I was going to church without going to church. There was no glory and grace of Christ, no knowledge of God, no life in the Spirit; only a very poorly executed service and a return to the legalism that Paul opposed in Galatians which was arrived at through muffling the voice of God with the philosophy and will of man. It was this experience that caused me to turn to Sinclair Ferguson's *Deserted by God* where he takes up a number of psalms, including this one. This taught me what Ps 42—43 was about. I too longed for God. But this was not the happy excitement of anticipation; it is a longing of agony, a torture of the soul.

Interpretation of Psalm 42—43

Psalm 42—43 are the first psalm of the second book of the Psalter that ends with Ps 72. That these are one psalm is evidenced not only by the refrain going beyond Ps 42, but also by the lack of a title before Ps 43. The reason for this psalm to have been divided into two is because the two strophes in Ps 42 are lament while the third strophe in what we call Ps 43 moves on to petitions rising from his grief. Book One also begins with two psalms which are actually one and provides an introduction to the theme of the Psalms, the blessedness of the seed of the woman and the rebellion of the seed of the serpent against Christ the King who will judge the wicked in the end, Book Two opens with a complaint of the righteous man who is not partaking in the joy of his salvation.

There are two things to note about this psalm. To begin with, this is an individual lamentation.⁴ “*My soul thirsts... When shall I come and appear before God? My tears... they say to me... These things I remember as I pour out my soul... Why are you cast down, O my soul...*” (42:1-5, emphasis mine). Second, there are two causes of depression here. The root cause is that he is away from the presence of God. This is brought on by his sincere faith and is the primary theme of the psalm (42:1-2, 4, 6-9a; 43:2a, 3-4). If that were not enough to contend with, he is also plagued by adversaries who attack him for his love of God (42:3, 9b-10; 43:1, 2b). In contrast to himself, his opponents are motivated by their unbelief. His suffering is therefore internal (known only by the spiritual eye) and external (visible to the physical eye). The psalm is about him *presently* being in a spiritual wasteland as he remembers the *past* and prays in hope for the *future*.

⁴ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Laments in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 184 and Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994), 80 *contra* Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry, FOTL* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 179-82 and Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:219 who reads the ‘I’ as representing the nation.

The title reads, “To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.” No one is certain about the meaning of ‘maskil.’ The primary reason for this lack of understanding is due to not knowing if maskil refers to the psalm itself or to the music that is to accompany the psalm (cf. Pss 32; 44—45; 52—55; 74; 78; 88—89; 142). The sons of Korah were singers in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Chr 20:19) who also wrote Pss 44—49, 84, 85, 87, and 88. Like Ps 42—43, Pss 44, 85, and 88 are also laments of these leaders of worship.

First Strophe, 42:1-6a

Such is his passion that he immediately launches into expressing the longing of his heavy heart. Psalms often bring us to their heart and set the course in their opening verse (e.g., 1:1; 23:1; 46:1; 118:1; 121:1; 133:1). When he sees the panting deer, he thinks of his own soul desiring God. Beyond that, deer bellow when they are suffering from thirst. This psalm is the psalmist’s bellowing in agony for God. As water is essential to the life of the deer, so too is God the source of his life. He calls God the ‘living God’ because he knows he is alive (42:2 cf. 84:2). He feels as though he is approaching death because of his unfulfilled spiritual need, but because he knows God is living he will entreat his soul to continue hoping (42:5). His faith lives because he knows God is living and sustaining his faith. Yet this individual mourning does not hunger after God in isolation. He wants to see the face of God and lead the multitude as they walk together into the house of God with exuberant praise (42:4). His thirst is not quenched by water from a stream, he only has his own tears to drink (42:3).⁵ Such is the vast difference between where he is and where he yearns to be.

In 42:3,10 we see that not only is he in misery within, but he has enemies without who constantly taunt him. These are likely his captors who are keeping him away from worship in Jerusalem.⁶ When we read these verses, as well as the refrain, we can feel his pain and see the tears streaming down his face.

My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

As with a deadly wound in my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

⁵ Paul R. Raabe, *Psalm Structures: A Study of Psalms with Refrains*. JSOTS 104 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 48.

⁶ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms, EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 330.

To sarcastically ask, “Where is your God?” is a common insult of the unbeliever (see Pss 79:10; 115:2). Such ridicule not only discourages one’s faith (42:9), it prompts the believer to wish God would rebuke his enemies by vindicating himself. So deep is the impact of this derision that he is moved to quote them twice. The psalmist knows there is no impunity in the character of God, but these mockers do not understand the workings of God within the soul; his faith and desire is folly to them precisely because they are unbelievers. His hope continues because he remembers the sweet fellowship with his brothers in the house of God (v.4). It is not that he simply wants to worship his God, he wants to worship his God along with the people of God. There will come a day when he is delivered from exile and enters his heavenly inheritance.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4).

The refrain, “Why are you cast down, O my soul,” is a Godward sorrow even though he is looking inside himself. This shows us two things: One, because of the time he has spent with his God in worship, he is now moved, amidst despair, to speak to his soul with a sanctified mind. It is not because the psalmist is saddened for an earthly reason, he is crushed because he is not able to now enjoy his God in heaven (cf. Ps 73:23-28). He loves God more than anything God has created. As David expressed in a similar psalm, “your steadfast love is better than life” (Ps 63:3). His life is in God’s heavenly court, not this age. Two, the Psalms are sung prayers. When we pray deeply, we will find this involves thinking to ourselves. The Christian faith causes us to reflect inward because the Spirit is working within us to transform us by means of the word. But when we ponder God’s providence, our sin, and our faith, what we believed turns us to look outside of ourselves and *back* in history and *up* to God. This is what the psalmist does here when he calls himself to “Hope in God” (cf. 62:5; 130:7; 146:5). This psalm is a picture of a man enthralled with God; he is the only kind of man who can suffer like this.

Second Strophe, 42:6b-11

The second strophe does not continue the thought of the second bicola of the refrain; he has not got out all of his anguish. Instead, he picks up on the first bicola in the refrain of being downcast as he sees himself on the unknown Mount Mizar (42:6).⁷ His Savior is still working in his heart to bring him to the place of

⁷ Raabe, 43. Mount Mizar means ‘mount littleness’ and is set in contrast to God’s holy hill in 43:4. Perhaps this mount is unknown to us because it never

hope. He began the psalm by appealing to flowing water as symbolizing that which he desired. The beauty of mountains and water surround him but he can only think of it as ugliness because he sees with the eyes of faith. He employs the imagery of water to depict not life, but death (42:7 cf. 69:1-2, 14-15; 88:17 where waters are also used of suffering). He is drowning in his suffering which he recognizes to be from the providential hand of God. He ascribes the waves that come crashing over him one after another to God; they are “your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves....” He does not want to be outside Jerusalem but he knows God has put him where he is. God has brought him to such despair only to heighten his desire for God and intensify his feelings of not being at home in this world of alleged autonomy and desired atheism (Ps 2:1-3; 10:4; Rom 1:18-20). The wicked forget God (Pss 9:17; 50:22); the righteous seek God (Pss 24:5-6; 27:8; 70:4; 105:3-4; 119:2,10).

The tricola we find in 42:8, the middle of the psalm, seems curious. Not only is God suddenly spoken of in the third person, but it is a beam of light that breaks into the gloom.

By day Yahweh commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

Reading this in the context of him remembering the former days clears up any confusion. What gives rise to the psalm is the very fact that he is not enjoying God’s covenant favor and faithfulness; he can only remember the time when he did (42:4). On the one hand he knows God does not change so he knows God remains with him and loves him (Ps 102:27) – he is the God of his life – but this does not conform to his situation because he cannot go and appear before him with his people.

The next verse, 42:9, is very much like 43:2, the main difference being that in 42:9 he is reciting his own prayer while in 43:2 he is addressing God again.

I say to God, my rock: refuge; “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” enemy?	For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
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Asking God why he has turned away or remained silent is not uncommon for the psalmist (see 10:1; 44:24; 74:1,11 cf. 83:1; 109:1).

actually existed. If so, his reference to where he was intended to sarcastically express his anger.

In calling God his rock he is saying God is his immovable stronghold; his unchanging refuge. Applying this consistent, solid nature to memory would mean God could not forget him. But he feels as though his rock has forgotten him. He does not forget his God simply because he cannot join with God's people (cf. Pss 63:1; 69:32-33). He is dying from his longing to meet with God in worship (42:10). What we can think of as his broken heart is compounded by the scoffers who break his bones by their poisonous questioning. They too are killing him.

So profound is his distress that he will ask himself three times,

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?

But his disheartened spirit remains. Three times he instructs himself to "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him" yet there is no sign of him even beginning to overcome the travail of his soul until the last strophe. God is working in him through the very words he sings but within this psalm we do not see him brought out of his torment. His deliverance will not come until hope is fulfilled and he again praises him.

Third Strophe, 43:1-5

I do not think commentators are right to make such a sharp distinction between 42:1-11 and 43:1-5, as if the first eleven verses were not prayer.⁸ All the psalms are prayers and this includes his speaking to himself where he has been ruminating on his earlier delight in the worship of God from years gone by. It is not as though there was anything wrong with what he has said up to this point; all of his complaints have been simultaneously directed to God and his own soul. The first two strophes are *prayer* of lament with the last strophe being a *prayer* of petition. One of the most significant ways God works in us is through suffering of all kinds. This is why it is such a prevalent theme in the NT, especially the Pauline epistles. But growing through suffering is a process and it is now that he is ready to utter two requests of his God (43:1, 3) while still keeping his deceitful adversaries in mind (43:1-2).

His first petition is for God to vindicate him and defend his cause (43:1). Having called God his rock, he confesses him as his refuge whom he feels has rejected him and given him over to the enemy (43:2). In his second petition, he asks God to "send out your light and your truth" to lead him out of the dark depths to God's holy hill where he dwells (43:3). The question circling 43:3 concerns the meaning of God's light and truth and whether light and truth is a hendiadys or not.⁹ Taking

⁸ E.g., Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1—50*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 329.

⁹ Wilfred G. E. Watson considers them to be such in *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, second edition (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 328. If

these as a hendiadys means God's truth *is* his light. God's truth is his word which is the light that will lead him.¹⁰ This certainly agrees nicely with Ps 119:43,105,130,160. In this understanding, the psalmist is asking God to minister to him by the Torah which will lead him into the presence of God. This is much like when the psalmist asks God, "teach me" (Pss 25:4-5; 86:11; 119:12,26,29,33, etc.). The problem is that the psalmist is desirous of worship before the face of God, not seeking God through his word in the land of Jordan. And as one scholar has observed, it is only when he comes to God's holy hill that the scornful question, "Where is your God?" will lose its sting.¹¹ But light and truth may not be a hendiadys at all. It might be that God's light is realizing the fullness of his redemption (cf. Ps 36:9) and God's truth is his fidelity to his covenant members (cf. Pss 40:10; 57:3).¹² This fits the context much better as the psalmist is recalling the Exodus, asking God to deliver him too (cf. 43:1d). Or God's light could be the light of God's face indicative of the blessing of his presence (cf. Pss 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3; 89:15; 119:135; Num 6:25-26 and consider Ex 13:21 where God led Israel with the light of his theophanic presence). Some take God's light and truth to be angels that guide the psalmist.¹³ This would fit well if Ex 23:20 or 32:34 (cf. Num 20:16) was appealed to where the Angel of Yahweh was sent to Israel into the Promised Land. However, these scholars think of angels in the plural so there is no connection to Israel in the wilderness in their mind, though this reality of a desolate land is certainly in view.

Out of his all-consuming spiritual affection, he seeks to go to the altar of God who is his chief joy (43:4). Here we have it, he claimed God to be his life (42:8) and now in like manner, he reveals his devotion by taking God as his "exceeding joy." There is a progression in 43:3-4 from God's holy hill to his dwelling to his altar to God himself.¹⁴ The heart of the godly man finds God to be his great joy for one reason: because God is his greatest love. God loves to be loved and when we love him, it is only because he is showing us his love by drawing us into the love of him (1 Jn 4:19). Left to ourselves, we would be the hostile unbeliever who

so, God's 'light and truth' nicely replaces the hendiadys of God's 'breakers and waves' of 42:7.

¹⁰ Gerstenberger, 181. Calvin also took 'truth' to speak of the Hebrew Scriptures (*comm.* Ps 43:3).

¹¹ James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 28.

¹² E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack Publishing, n.d. rpt.), 105, Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan n.d. rpt.), 201, VanGemeren, 336.

¹³ Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*. JSOTS 20 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 34, Roland E. Murphy, *The Gift of the Psalms* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2000), Allan Harman, *Psalms: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1998), 182.

¹⁴ Raabe, 50.

feels no pain of not being able to worship God. Our salvation is through the sacrificial gift of Christ (2 Cor 9:15; 8:9) and our salvation leads us into communion with the Triune God which he has in himself. So intimate is our fellowship in the covenant that God is “my God.”

The instruction the psalmist issues to himself by his faith ultimately looks ahead to the unseen age to come (43:5). With the refrain being repeated at the end of the psalm, the final line serves to close the psalm with his eschatological hope. The life of the age to come is the finding of pleasure and satisfaction in God alone (cf. Pss 65:4; 73:25-26; 84:10). Worship, therefore, is the greatest expression of the age to come in this age (Heb 12:18-29). We are closest to heaven and are displaying our heavenly citizenship in worship for this age is in a futile, self-destructive rebellion against God and in the power of the devil (Rom 8:7-8; 1 Jn 5:19). God is the psalmists’ salvation and his God. God is our salvation because he alone saves us (Pss 68:20; 98:1; 145:19). God is our God because he *alone* saves us (Pss 62:5; 72:18; 136:4).

The Voice of Christ: New Covenant Reading

Jesus had been sent into this world from above (Jn 3:31) during which time he was in a state of humiliation (Jn 14:28c). He was the glory of God (Jn 1:14) yet was not “with God” (Jn 1:1-2, lit., “face to face”) as he had been since before creation (Jn 17:24). During his incarnation, Jesus sang the Psalms along with fellow Israelites.¹⁵ Jesus could therefore sing this psalm as a pilgrim, a stranger in a strange land (Jn 17:14,16 cf. 1:11). This is a good part of what Isaiah had in view when he prophesied that Jesus would be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3).

In Gethsemane, when approaching the fulfillment of his mission in obedience to his Father’s will by dying the death of a sinner for sinners (Phil 2:6-8), Jesus said to Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death...” (Mt 26:38). This statement of his is nothing less than an unmarked quote of the refrain from Ps 42—43:¹⁶

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?

But there were two realities unique to himself by Jesus knew the heartache more deeply than the psalmist in this, the lowest point of his humiliation. First, he was

¹⁵ Even now from heaven Jesus sings the Psalms. Stemming from Rom 15:8, note how Paul ascribes the ‘I’ of Ps 18:49 to Jesus in Rom 15:9. The author of Hebrews puts Ps 22:22 in the mouth of Jesus in Heb 2:12.

¹⁶ Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Psalms in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 75.

carrying the sins of not only the psalmist, but of all those who would worship God. But beyond that, the communion and love he had for his Father in heaven was infinitely greater than that of any despairing believer.

For Jesus, “the altar of God” was his sacrificial cross that made him sorrowful (Jn 12:27) so that we could find God to be our “exceeding joy” instead of being cast out of his presence as an enemy (43:4). Jesus suffered the wrath of divine abandonment so we who are enemies of God and ignorant of him by birth would not.

All of the Synoptics record a Roman soldier contemptuously offering Jesus sour wine, but only John quotes Jesus exclaiming, “I thirst” (Jn 19:28). This is what prompted the soldier’s offer that fulfilled Ps 69:21 (see Mt 27:48). But Jesus refused the drink (Mk 15:23) because it was the cup of God’s wrath that was appointed for him to drink on our behalf (Mk 10:38; Lk 22:42; Jn 18:11). And in contrast to the other Gospels, John does not include Jesus’ cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” when he took Ps 22 upon his lips (see Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). When John is read, we find that this excruciating question of Jesus is replaced with his simple and solemn statement, “I thirst.”¹⁷ This connection between Ps 22 and Ps 42—43 is only strengthened when we note that the psalmist asks in 43:2, “why have you rejected me?” When Jesus said, “I thirst,” he was not merely thinking about his physical symptoms. Nor were these merely words of his own uttered in his dying moment. By his death Jesus was bringing Ps 42—43 (and even the Davidic Ps 63) to fulfillment, thereby bringing his work in the covenant of redemption to completion (Jn 19:30, *tetelestai*).¹⁸ Psalm 42—43 therefore takes the place of Ps 22 in John while he still highlights the horrible desertion of the Father toward his Son. With his characteristic theological insight and spiritual depth, only the psalm changes. The earthly deer in Ps 42 is a picture of the heavenly. Likewise, John sees the spiritual thirst in the physical. Just as in Jn 4:14 and 6:35 when Jesus spoke of water, his cry of thirst meant something more than earthly water. In keeping with his symbolic language, John transcends the human level once again. In saying “I thirst,” Jesus was saying, “I am *dying* for you Father. I want to return to your presence.” Jesus was heavenly minded to the end. Jesus desired his Father’s presence because he was spiritual (Jn 8:28-29; 14:31); he belonged to heaven (Jn 17:14; 18:36) so the world hated him (Jn 15:18-19). And even in their hardened rejection, the world saw that Jesus loved his Father. So Jesus prayed with the psalmist (43:1 cf. 35:22-26; 49:15; 69:17-18; 119:153-154),

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause

¹⁷ L. T. Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst in John 19:28-30,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 508.

¹⁸ There is also a connection between Jn 19:28 and 4:34 where Jesus said it is his food to accomplish (*teleioso*) his Father’s will. Jesus will finally and fully satisfy his hunger when he drains the bitter cup dry in submission to his Father’s will.

against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!

As the early church hymn proclaims, Jesus' prayer was answered: "He was manifested in the flesh, *vindicated* by the Spirit" (1 Tim 3:16 cf. Rom 1:4). Or in the words of Ps 43:3, God brought his Son to his holy hill and he entered his rightful dwelling. His resurrection was his vindication of being God's righteous Son. So when we pray with the psalmist (43:3),

Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!

we are asking for Christ to redeem us who, by his death and resurrection, fulfilled all of God's promises (2 Cor 1:20; Heb 7:22; 8:6; Jn 1:17). Jesus is God's light (Jn 8:12; 12:46) and truth who leads us into the life of his kingdom (Jn 14:3-6).¹⁹ Through union with Christ, we are delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the King who died and conquered death (Col 1:13-14).

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¹⁹ Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 27.

Notes on Psalm 42—43

Strophic Structure

What one immediately notices is the refrain that occurs three times in 42:5-6a, 11, and 43:5.²⁰

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.

The refrain divides the psalm into three strophes, 42:1-4, 42:6b-10, and 43:1-4, respectively. The refrain also denotes Ps 42—43 as originally being one psalm, as are Pss 1 and 2 and Pss 9 and 10. Having erroneously divided this psalm into two psalms, it appears as though the refrain occurs in the middle and end of Ps 42 and at the end of Ps 43. Each strophe contains a change of imagery adding to the distinction of each. The images within the strophes also bear a relation to one another: thirst and tears, waterfalls and waves, and refuge and holy hill.²¹

Parallelism

The first line of the refrain contains a synonymous parallel (42:5a, 11a, 43:5a).

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?

In 43:1 we have a chiasm:

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!

We see the a b b' a' pattern with the paralleling of

a Vindicate... and defend
b Ungodly
b' Deceitful and unjust

²⁰ *Contra* J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2000), 2:153 who sees five stanzas held together by three refrains in seven places. Psalms 24, 46, 49, 56, 57, 67, 99, and 107 also use refrains.

²¹ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 351.

a' Deliver

The twist comes in the first line containing two pleas – vindicate and defend – with the second conjunction – deceitful and unjust – occurring in the description of the enemy, not in the second plea. This means the first epithet of the enemy is just one word, ungodly, as is the second plea, deliver. There are then two parallels in 43:3, the first being a synthetic parallel.

Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!

In the first line he prays for God to lead him by his light and truth but expands this in the second line, specifying where he wants God to lead him – to his dwelling place on his holy hill. The second parallel is in the second line. He first sings of God's holy hill but then indicates that this is not only God's sacred hill, but where he dwells.

Figures of Speech

The psalm opens with a simile. "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." In the following three verses the psalmist uses three metaphors when he thinks of his soul *thirsting* for God and his tears being his *food* which leads him to *pour* out his soul to God. Speaking of his tears being food signifies that he is crying throughout the day in the way that he would normally eat (cf. Ps 80:5). Pouring out his soul to God illustrates how his prayers openly flow from him like water out of a cistern. Waterfalls and breaking waves portray the weight and force of his suffering (42:7). He speaks of God as being his rock (42:9) to convey God's faithfulness and strength. But there seems to be irony here: his God whom he knows to be an immovable and trustworthy rock has forgotten him. Following the imagery, it is not like a rock that is solid to 'forget' the one who needs him. He returns to a simile in 42:10 where he likens the continual taunting of his adversaries to a deadly wound in his bones. Considering God his refuge in 43:2a is a metaphor for God being his protection and comfort. Light is a metaphor for God's presence in 43:3.