

A Combined Psalm (see also Psalms 9/10 & 32/33)

From sadness to song / from downcast to delight; and this without any change in circumstance

An Exposition of Psalm 42/43

Together these two form a lament and a plea for vindication from oppression by enemies. They together rehearse the joys of temple worship and the longing to experience it once again. It starts in tears and ends in joy. The change is not in circumstances but in the Psalmist. First we will look at some preliminary observations. Then we will trace the poet's thought through the three movements.

Preliminary Observations

1. How Book 2 begins (notice also how Book 1 ends)

Lamenting and pleading are characteristic of this combined psalm with hope of experiencing exceeding joy in God with a group of like-minded people.

2. A unified composition

Psalms 42 and 43 are to be read as a unit. This is so because 1) Ps.43 has no heading 2) ancient manuscripts confirm this 3) both share repeated refrains 4) close parallel with the "cries".

3. Another poet

From Ps.42 to Ps.49 we read poems from Korah's sons. Korah was killed by the LORD for his rebellion (Num.16). His sons escaped the judgment and became leaders in temple worship (cf. 1Chr. 6:22, 31-32; 9:19).

4. Radical change in reference to God

Preceding this Psalm and following Ps.83 you have the Psalmist referring to God as Yahweh mainly. Now in the section of Pss.42-83 you find the dominate way of

referring to the Lord as God (*Elohim*) [notice the pattern is throughout Book 2. Elohim used 188 x in contrast to 48x in Book 1. In Ps.42/43 Elohim used 16x and Yahweh 1x].

The Three Movements

1. 42:1-5 The Droughts
2. 42:6-11 The Depths
3. 43:1-5 The Delight

A look at the three movements

Now it's time to think together on these psalms. The writer questioning God and despairing of hope goes through the droughts and depths before he gets to his delight. Let's watch...and then imitate!

The Droughts

v.1-5

What is the writer's drought?

What it looks like

v.1-2a

- ◆ Pants & thirsts: A biblical image of the quest for fellowship with and satisfaction in the LORD. (see Ps.36:8-9; 63:1; Isa. 55:1f; Matt.5:6; Jn.4:10-14; 7:37-39; Rev.21:6). He longs for this but is not experiencing it.

Why he wants this

v.2b-5

- ◆ When shall I come and appear before God? (v.2b)
As a Levite exiled among Gentiles, this Psalmist was a worship leader who was **hindered** from leading groups of pilgrims to Jerusalem for a festival (cf. Ps. 84:7 ; also see Ex.23:14-17). And this postponement grieved his heart.
- ◆ My tears while they say to me (v.3)
Next we see that not only was he hindered he was **harassed**. Enemies taunted him while he longed for corporate worship.
- ◆ These things I remember (v.4)
His memory of former pleasure caused fresh pain.
- ◆ Why are you downcast O my soul
Here we notice the emotional state of the writer. He is downcast. Confronting and admonishing himself with truth was one of the Psalmist's strategy to fight depression. The stubborn melancholy does not break yet.

The Depths

v.6-11

Look for and list the descriptions of the “landscape” in this movement.

The land of Jordon, Herman and Mizar

Outside the Land is a sign of danger and/or disobedience/discipline. Mizar literally means “littleness”.

◆ Deep, waterfalls, breakers, waves

From drought (v.1-5) to deluge (v.6) tells us that the Psalmist is in intense suffering (cf. 69:1-2; 88:7; see also Jonah 2:4) “Deep” reminds the reader of the chaotic, dark waters of creation in Gen.1:2.

Notice what the Psalmist does in the midst of intense suffering.

◆ My soul is cast down within me therefore... (v.6)

Remembering God was his way of bringing his soul up from the depths. Remember that...

◆ Your, your, your (v.7)

He remembers that all the suffering is ordered by the Lord (cf. Ps. 119:71; 135:6,7; see also Matt.14:22-33).

◆ The LORD (v.8)

Here is the turning point in the Psalms. The writer used Yahweh instead of Elohim. His personal Name stands for the God who makes and keeps covenant; the faithful One who cares for His people. “Steadfast love” and “songs in the night” are evidence of who He is; namely Yahweh. Remembering “Yahweh” begins the pull of the soul out from the slumber.

Though he is not in the Land, the circumstances had not changed and he still is struggling with his faith (notice v.9-11) the LORD was now “my rock” (v.9); stable, strong and unchanging (cf. 18:2; 31; 46; etc.).

The Delight

43:1-5

Profound changes occurred in the Psalmist as seen in 43:1-5. Though similar language may be found here (see the refrains of 42:5,11; 43:5) the tone is much different. A transition from lament (dominating Ps.42) to plea and then praise shows a different disposition. We now come to requests from the Psalmist. In v.1-5 we hear him putting forth his prayer requests out of his hope in God.

- ◆ Vindicate me (v.1)
A desire to be seen as innocent of the accusations from the Gentiles.
- ◆ Deliver me (v.1)
A desire to be rescued.
- ◆ Send out your light and your truth (v.3)
A desire for his original longing in 42:1 to be satisfied.
- ◆ Then I will go to the altar of God (v.4)
The altar is the place where the blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled to make atonement for the people and where God forgave the sins of his people. In other words, the light of God leads him to the truth of his sinfulness and takes him to the place of atonement and forgiveness.
- ◆ To God my exceeding joy (4b)
The final goal of life is God himself, experienced as our exceeding joy. “God, the gladness of my rejoicing (a literal translation)” tells the reader that the Psalmist has been granted his original desire of Ps.42. He is not physically in Jerusalem. He is not at the Temple. But he is finally with God his gladness of all his joys. EXCEEDING JOY! What is the result of all this?
- ◆ I will praise you (v.5)
When God is viewed as our exceeding joy praise happens. Joy cannot keep quiet. Now the Psalmist can say what he has said throughout the two psalms (42:5, 11, 43:5) but this time there is confidence and joy.

An Application of Psalm 42 /43

When facing unpromising circumstances with a divided heart learn the strategy of these Psalms.

1. Don't “feed” off of your grief (42:3).
2. Remember the “good old days” are not necessarily the best days (42:4)
3. Remembering God as He really is brings about a new beginning (42:6,8)
4. Understanding the sovereignty of God over suffering assists (42:7)
5. Don't listen to but rather speak to yourself in truth (42:5,11,43:5)
6. Pray for “light and truth” to lead you spiritually to God (43:3)
7. This coming to God will require a look at sin and the atonement (43:4)
8. Don't stop praying this way until God is your “exceeding joy” (43:4)
9. Express this exceeding joy in the congregation of the faithful (43:4)
10. And never forget that amid suffering HOPE IN GOD (43:5)