

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 42-43

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If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 42 and 43

Introduction

Book Two of Psalms

As we go through the Second Book of Psalms, which includes Psalm 42 to Psalm 72, we note some differences. Firstly, David is no longer the sole author. Another change concerns the use of the Name LORD – יהוה (YHWH). In the First Book of Psalms this is the most frequently used Name, being used some 272 times, while God אלהים (*Elohim*) is rarely used. In fact it is only used 15 times. Now that we enter the Second Book of Psalms, we see a reversal as Elohim occurs 164 times, while God's covenant name YHWH is only used 30 times. This, amongst other things, shows that the person who compiled all the psalms had some order in mind.

Connected Psalms

It is obvious as you read through the psalms that Psalm 42 and 43 are connected.¹ Both of these psalms have that same wording: “*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help*” (Psalm 42:5). In the next two quotes “*and my God*” is added (Psalm 42:11 and Psalm 43:5). This indicates that this was once one song in three couplets (stanza), and part three was separated. We also see the same spirit and language, but the difference is that Psalm 42 reads as a lament, with instructions (*maskil*) and has no prayer, and this is what Psalms 43 supplies.

Author

The author is unknown. Verse 1 has “**For** the choir director. A Maskil **for** the sons of Korah. לְמַנְצֵחַ מִשְׁכֵּיל לְבְנֵי־קֹרַח (*l'manat'tzeach mas'kil l'benei-Korach*). Here לְ *le* is used as **for** or to the choir director, and so for the sons of Korah. This leaves us with an unknown author, however, if Psalm 42-43 are one song, we can attribute both of them to David, and indeed the Septuagint has Psalm 43 as “*A Psalm of David*”.

Who are the Sons of Korah / the Korahites (בני הקרחים - בני־קרח)

These are the descendants, the *Sons of Korah*, who had not participated in the rebellion (Numbers 26:11). Besides being porters and gate-keepers they became important worship leaders in the tabernacle and later in the temple (2 Chronicles 20:19). Various psalms were given to this family so they could to compose music for them, however some psalms may have been written by them (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88).

Psalm that deal with depression

As we read this psalm it is clear that David, or the psalmist, is dealing with depression. He is not alone, as many people have either suffered temporarily, or even from long-term depression.

¹ See *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature* by Rabbi Benjamin J. Segal.

Rabbinical footnote: “*There are one hundred forty-seven psalms in the book of Psalms, corresponding to the 147 years of Jacob's life, as suggested in the verse 'You are Holy, enthroned upon the praises of Israel.'**” (Massechet Sofrim 16:11) * Israel being the other name of Jacob. See <https://dafyomi.co.il/parsha/vayech4.htm> Even that number does not work, as many more psalms appear to be split in two, amongst them are Psalms 1-2; Psalms 105-106; etc etc.

Amongst them are the following:

1. Job (Job 3:1-23, 17:13-15)
2. Elijah (1 Kings 19:4)
3. David (Psalm 6:3, 6)
4. Asaph (Psalm 77:7-9)
5. Paul (2 Corinthians 1:8)
6. Yeshua, yes even Yeshua. The prophet Isaiah called Him “*a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*” (Isaiah 53:3) and “*He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.’ And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, ‘Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.’*” Mark 14:34-36

Before dealing with these Psalms, I want to make sure you understand that I have no medical expertise, and therefore I can only give biblical principles to believers, in the hope that this will help you if you suffer. However I also urge you, if you feel depressed, to speak to a Bible believing counsellor and, if needed, to a medical doctor to seek spiritual and medical advice.

Quote

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures* (1965) pp. 20-21, wrote:

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are **listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself**? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, “Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you.”

The psalmist, as we will see, is honestly listening to himself talk about events, which were true, but after his moaning, he speaks to his heart and says “STOP, listen, Hope in God...” That is also true in the Brit Chadashah, where we are told to “*take every thought captive to the obedience of Messiah*” (2 Corinthians 10:5), for all our thinking is self or man-centred and we need to replace it with God-centred thoughts.

Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch resistant fighter and one of the “*Righteous Among the Nations,*” summarized this principle well when she said:

*“Look around and be distressed.
Look within and be depressed.
Look to Jesus and be at rest.”*

We should not deny that at times we may be upset, depressed, or angry, yet at the same time we should speak to our heart about the hope we have, and continue *looking to Yeshua*, the author of our salvation, for the solution.

Hope appears twice in this Psalm

As a messianic I read it as a commandment, HOPE in God! How much more is this true for us, than it was for David? Many of the blessings that we know and experience already were

still future for David. When we think of our benefits as believers in Yeshua, there are many, but let me list seven:

1. He has given us Salvation. “He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).
2. He is our Justification, so I don’t let myself talk on and on about all my sins and iniquities, because Yeshua accomplished that justification for us (Romans 10:9-10).
3. He adopted us as sons and daughters (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5).
4. Sanctification, so I don’t let myself talk on and on about my spiritual failures, because having been sanctified means that I can change, through the power of the Holy (sanctifying) Spirit, who is at work in me. (“...*brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth*” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).
5. Glorification, so I don’t let myself talk on and on about my current darkness, for this too, is the work of Yeshua in us. “*And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified*” (Romans 8:30, see also John 17:22).
6. We know He is building a room for us (John 14:1-3), and so too, with Abraham, we are looking to the New Jerusalem (Galatians and Revelation 21-22).
7. When Yeshua will call us to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14), we shall be with the LORD evermore (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

When we talk to ourselves we see all the negatives, but in Messiah we have benefits from our heavenly Father, who desires to be with us. He sent His Son to die for us and sent His Spirit to us, to enable us to be sons and daughters. As such, I need to redirect my thoughts from myself to Him and say: “*Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God*” (Psalm 42:11).

Pondering Psalm 42 and 43

We will divide these Psalms according to the divisions created by the refrain.

Psalm 42:1-5

¹For the choir director. A Maskil of (for) the sons of Korah.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, 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 all day long, “Where is your God?” ⁴ These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng *and* lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. ⁵ Why are you in despair, O my soul? And *why* have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *For* the help of His presence.

Like a deer that longs for waterways in the hot Judean wilderness, so David’s soul longs after God. The scarcity of water and the deer stretching his neck out for water both reflect his desire to be in the presence of God. The phrase, *Living God* אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים (*El chai*),² means more than God is alive; this is the God who has life in and of Himself, and who is the author of all life,

² Other Hebrew variants

Elohim chayim אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; Jeremiah 10:10, 23:36;

El Chai אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים Joshua 3:10; 2Kings 19:16; Psalm 84:2(3); Isaiah 37:4, 17; Hosea 2:1(1:10)

Aramaic in Daniel 6:21, 27 (20, 26) אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים Aramaic Elaha chaya

very much in opposition to the lifeless idols of the Gentiles. As such the author requests that the living God would act and reveal His presence, not in some mystical experience, but he desires to worship the Lord in the tabernacle, the physical place where the LORD dwelt. The House of God was where the Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence.

Sadly, the first waterways he encounters are his tears which had become his food, day and night. David is saying he could not eat, his sorrow was overwhelming, much like Hannah in (1 Samuel 1:7-8) and Asaph when he describes the same food of the faithful in Psalm 80:5.

The absence of God is exacerbated by the taunting of the unfaithful, or more likely the pagans, as they cry “*where is your God?*” David had fled to pagans, the Philistines and Moabites, but now they were mocking him. Their idols were easy to locate, they could attend a local shrine and see a god, but the God of Israel desired to be worshipped at the Tabernacle. David recalls leading worship at the Tabernacle with קול־רִנָּה (*kol rinah*), the voice of joy, the opposite of his tears, and the songs of תּוֹדָה (*todah*), thanks-giving, the opposite of this lament. David had led the throngs at the Holy seasons, so we see the final contrast here, as David goes about mourning solitarily.

David then speaks to his heart (verse 5) and poses the question, *why?* This is self-reflective, *why am I down cast, why am I disturbed* about the situation? We should also self-reflect, but if this leads to a downward spiral always remember to also declare your faith: “*Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.*” The last phrase “*For the help of His presence,*” in Hebrew יְשׁוּעוֹת (*y'shu-ot*), carries the meaning of salvation which comes from His presence, or simply put, David acknowledges that his help, his salvation comes from the Lord.

Many people go to counseling and talk and talk and talk about their feelings, and it can become a never-ending story. (I am reminded of Dr. Oliver Sacks who was in psycho-therapy for 42 years). But here is an antidote against spiritual depression: we need to stop listening to ourselves, and remind ourselves that the Living God is still in control and praise Him for His rescue. Life has many ups and downs, so David continually reminds himself of God's help, and we need to remind ourselves to speak to our heart and say that He is the Living God, in whom we have placed our hope; and we shall praise Him, for He is our help, our salvation and our God.

Psalm 42:6:11

⁶ O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. ⁸ The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life. ⁹ I will say to God my rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” ¹⁰ As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” ¹¹ Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

In verses 6 to 10 we see the downward spiral again. We see David on the run, living in exile, in the unpromised lands across the Jordan (east). He is far away from Mount Zion and unable to be in the presence of God. David describes the mountain peaks of Hermon (north), the highest mountain in the Bible. He then talks of Mount Mitz'ar (מִצְעָר), but this is the only

reference in scripture so we do not know where this is. An alternative, *mits'ar*, could be translated as “a small thing,”³ and so the Greek translation has “*little hill*.”

Deep calls to deep, pictures the waters from the upper Jordan falling in the deep bottoms of the falls, but this is poetic language so it is describing his afflictions, which are overwhelming (see also Psalm 69:1); *deep calling to deep* as if his troubles were calling to his distress, back and forwards. His troubles are rolling over, in an effort to drown him. Yet the LORD (here we have one of those rare occurrences of the Covenant Name of God in book two), at dawn promises lovingkindness *חֶסֶד* (*chesed*), and therefore the songs of salvation are with him all day and night, and with that he releases his prayer to God for his life. Here are some of the double meanings of the name of God *אֱלֹהִים* (*El*) as it can also mean strength, so he prays for God to strengthen his life. God was also called the *Living God* *אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים* (*El chai*), who has become the God of my life *אֱלֹהֵי חַיָּי* (*El chaiai*).

In Psalm 18:2 God is described as *the Rock*. It is a declaration of the coming promised redemption, but here in our psalm (verse 9) “*I will say to God my rock, ‘Why have You forgotten me?’*” there is a sense of loneliness, as if David is standing on a lone rock in the desert. David’s downward spiral is still not complete as he cries “*Why have You forgotten me?’*” On top of that there are the enemies who desire to crush David and again they revile him with their taunts. For a second time David speaks to his soul, “*why downcast, why disturbed? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, for He remains my Saviour and my God.*”

Psalm 43:1-5

¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me! ² For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy? ³ O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. ⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

In this third segment we see some imprecatory language against the pagans, the ungodly peoples amongst whom David dwelled, most likely the Philistine or Moabite peoples. Yet God is still far-off, God the Rock, who is his rescue had forgotten David (42:9) is now described as having “*cast me off*” and the cruelty of the enemy is causing David to pace about even more and it deepens his mourning over the situation.

As soon as David becomes aware of his repetitive downward spiraling behaviour, he stops and prays for light and truth, two descriptors of the Word of God. At this time there were no printed Bibles, and it would be extremely unlikely that David had scrolls of the Torah or of Joshua, Judges, Ruth or Job with him. As such he prays for *light* and *truth* (Psalm 119:105, 160). Note how these lead David, as though they are personified, just as John would declare *the Word become flesh* (John 1:1-18). They lead David to the Holy Hill of Zion, God’s dwelling place. Previously, in verse 42:2 David had wondered *when* he would be able to come into God’s presence, now He is led there by *light* and *truth*.

³ BDB מצער *mits'ar* BDB Definition: 1) a small thing, STRONG **H4705** *petty* (in size or number).

Once he is there in the presence of the LORD, he will sacrifice on the altar and rejoice with music and song. In the final verse you have a sense of David taunting himself, “*Why are cast down, O my soul?*” for he knows that his help and salvation is on the way, and his hope and faith remain firm in God, as such he praises his God!

Conclusion

In the two Psalms we see David struggling with questions, like “where is God,” when he is feeling disheartened or stressed. Each time he spoke to himself, never denying the reality of the situation. But we also note that David keeps speaking to his heart and reminds himself to hope in God and praise Him, as He is his salvation and He is his God.

This too is the come-back for any born-again believer. Yes, we may be cast down from time to time, yet we too will speak to our soul “Hope in God!” and we too need to praise Him, for He is our help, our salvation, He is our God!

Selah

Blessings in Messiah

Paul & Sue