

# **BOOK TWO**

## **PSALMS 42 - 72**

## Psalm 42-43

Psalm 42: Easter Vigil and Holy Souls, Nov 2nd

Morning Prayer Monday Week 2

Psalm 43: Morning Prayer Tuesday Week 2

Psalms 42 and 43 (numbered 41 and 42 in the Greek and Latin Versions, and so in the Christian liturgical books) form one piece. Psalm 42 comprises Parts 1 and 2 and Psalm 43 completes the song with Part 3. This is the first psalm in Book Two (Psalms 42-72).

For the most part these psalms speak of God 'ĕlōhîm [אֱלֹהִים], and only rarely speak of YHWH. This may indicate that they originated in the northern kingdom of Israel. This seems to be the case for this psalm, the title of which reads: 'To the leader. A Maskil\* of the Korahites'. The Korahites were a clan of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 6:24; Numbers 26:58) and had an important role in the temple in Jerusalem (1Chronicles 9:19; 2Chronicles 2:19). It is suggested that before this they may have been a guild of singers attached to the sanctuary of Dan. See the article in the Introduction.

It is interesting to note that God is invoked twenty-two times under a variety of titles. This gives a comprehensive dimension to the psalm, since there are twenty-two consonants in the Hebrew alphabet. The central theme is that of God's absence, an absence which stretches desire. We might think of John of the Cross's poem: 'Where have you hidden, Beloved' (the Spiritual Canticle) and 'One dark night'. Compare also the following:

All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant.  
Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way,  
yet you have ... covered us with deep darkness ...  
Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us any longer!  
Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

– Psalm 44:17-19, 23-24

As we pray the psalm we might think of Jesus being rejected, reviled, and misunderstood. We might contemplate him in his agony and on the cross, thirsting to be in communion with God, and thirsting for love: 'I am thirsty' (John 19:38). Jesus knows our thirst and gives himself to us in love to satisfy it:

If you drink of the water that I will give you, you will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

– John 4:14

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

– Revelation 22:17

Compare the following:

Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits.  
For the memory of me is sweeter than honey,  
and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb.  
Those who eat of me will hunger for more,  
and those who drink of me will thirst for more.

– Sirach 24:19-21

### Part One (Psalm 42:1-4)

The psalmist has experienced God's presence. He is exiled from the sanctuary and his priestly ministry and misses the experience of closeness. He experiences God as absent. He is like a timid, alert female deer which has the scent of the life-giving water and is longing for it.

Compare the following:

Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

– Joel 1:20

**<sup>1</sup>As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my whole being\* longs for you, O God.**

'My whole being' translates the Hebrew *nepeï*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction.

The expression 'With all my longing' is another attempt to pick up the meaning of *nepeš*.

**<sup>2</sup>With all my longing\* I thirst for God, the living God.**

The prophet Ezekiel sees in the water flowing from the right side of the temple a symbol of life pouring out from God nourishing the whole world:

He brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar ... Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed ... Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes.

– Ezekiel 47:1-9

We think of the water flowing from the right side of Jesus on the cross (John 19:34). 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' (John 7:38).

Compare the following from the New Testament:

Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.

– 1Corinthians 13:12

They will see his face.

– Revelation 22:4

**<sup>2b</sup>When shall I come and see the face of God?**

Memories of better times

**<sup>3</sup>My tears have been my food by day and by night, as they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'**

**<sup>4</sup>These things I remember, as I pour out my longing\*: how I would go with the throng, leading them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.**

**<sup>5</sup>Why are you cast down, O my soul\*? Why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. I will praise him still, my Saviour\* and my God.**

Compare:

You have fed them with tears to eat, given them tears to drink in full measure.

– Psalm 80:5; see also Psalm 102:9

The pagan neighbours have their idols. The psalmist has nothing to show. Compare the taunt thrown at Jesus as he was dying:

He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'

– Matthew 27:43

Again we have the word *nepeš* translated as 'longing' in verse four and as 'soul' in verse five. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. All the psalmist's longing for life is directed towards God. He misses the cult in the sanctuary in which he had a leading role. Compare:

They feast on the abundance of your house, and you slake their thirst from the river of your delights. For with you is the fount of life. In your light we see light.

– Psalm 36:8-9

This verse functions as a refrain concluding Part One of the psalm. It is perhaps intended to be sung in a tentative way, gathering momentum when it is repeated later in the psalm.

God is called 'Saviour'. God does not prevent us from having hurtful experiences (often brought about by people refusing to obey God), but God does come to us with God's saving help, sustaining us to go through the difficulties, and maintaining for us the divine communion in which life consists. See the article 'Saving Help' in the Introduction.

**Part Two (Psalm 42:6-10)**

The psalmist gives expression to the sadness that comes over him as he describes being overwhelmed with forces of chaos, made all the more painful by the taunts slung at him for believing. In his pain, he prays:

Once again 'soul' is an attempt to translate *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. 'Mizar' means 'small'. The reference seems to be to an unidentified hill in northern Galilee. It is small in contrast to the height of Mount Hermon.

The sound of the cataracts bursting out from the mountain where the Jordan rises symbolises for the psalmist the destructive and chaotic forces that threaten to overwhelm him. Compare:

The waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me.

– 2Samuel 22:5

Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

– Psalm 88:7

This is repeated in Psalm 43:2

Repeated from Psalm 42:3.

The refrain of verse five is repeated, concluding Part Two of the psalm. The singing is perhaps now more assertive. As he recalls the kindness of YHWH, hope begins to take over.

**<sup>6</sup>When my soul\* is cast down within me I think of you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.**

**<sup>7</sup>Deep calls to deep with the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have overwhelmed me.**

**<sup>8</sup>By day YHWH sends forth his kindness\*, and by night I keep singing his song, a plea to the God of my life.**

**<sup>9</sup>I say to God: 'My Rock'.**

*Why have you forgotten me?*

*Why must I walk about mournfully oppressed by the foe?*

**<sup>10</sup>My very bones are breaking under the pressure of my enemies' taunts, as they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'**

**<sup>11</sup>Why are you cast down, O my soul\*? Why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God. I will praise him still, my Saviour\* and my God.**

**Part Three (Psalm 43:1-4)**

As in Part One the psalmist thinks of the cult (holy mountain, dwelling, altar, praise). The imagery of this concluding section is taken from the court, as the psalmist is appealing to the highest tribunal – that of God. He expresses his desire and his trust that he will experience again the communion with God which he experienced in the past.

**<sup>1</sup>You be my judge\*, O God,  
and defend my cause against  
an ungodly people; rescue me  
from those who are deceitful  
and unjust!**

**<sup>2</sup>You are the God in whom I  
take refuge.**

*Why have you cast me off?  
Why must I walk about mourn-  
fully oppressed by the foe?*

**<sup>3</sup>O send forth your light and  
your truth; let these be my  
guide; let them bring me to  
your holy mountain, to the  
place where you dwell.**

**<sup>4</sup>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.**

**<sup>5</sup>Why are you cast down, O my  
soul\*? Why are you disquieted  
within me? Hope in God. I will  
praise him still, my Saviour\*  
and my God.**

At the beginning of the Tridentine Mass, verses one to four were prayed by the priest.

This repeats Psalm 42:9.

In exile the psalmist asks for God's light and truth to escort him back into God's presence.

You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, YHWH, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, YHWH, that your hands have established.

– Exodus 15:17

We hear the refrain for the third time (see 42:5,11), now sung as an exultant hymn by the psalmist who knows that God has heard and will answer his prayer.