

Psalm 42

An intense longing for God
To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.

Psalm 42: Psalms 42 and 43 are two psalms that should probably be taken as one for several reasons (42:5, 11 and 43:5), provide a threefold refrain for the poem; the theme is the same.

Psalm 43 is the only psalm in the second book that lacks a superscription; and the two psalms are in fact joined together in some Hebrew manuscripts.

Using the refrain “Hope thou in God” as a marker, the poem yields three stanzas.

First, the psalmist expresses his deep longing for God (42:1-5); second, his sad lament and dejection before God (42:6-11); finally, his sure confidence in God (43:1-5).

The three stanzas reveal the changing moods of the psalmist: from longing and regret to perplexity, then to trust and assurance.

If only every downcast soul could end up in that third stanza!

Verses 1-11:

As in the case of Psalms 9 and 10, Psalms 42 and 43 were originally probably one.

Some ancient manuscripts put them together; Psalm 43 has no title while the rest around it do.

In form, Psalm 42 may be considered an individual lament.

This psalm also exemplifies a primary characteristic of Book II of the Psalms, the preference of the ascription “God” (or parallels to it), for the Deity.

The occasion and situation of Psalm 42 are historically unspecified; however, what is obvious is that the psalmist’s situation was intense and greatly aggravated by his surrounding mockers.

Consequently, Psalm 42 is a dirge of two stanzas.

- I. Stanza One: The Psalmist Sings of His Drought (42:1-5).
 - A. The Content of This Stanza (42:1-4);
 - B. The Chorus of This Dirge (compare verse 11) (42:5).
- II. Stanza Two: The Psalmist Sings of His Drowning (42:6-11).
 - A. The Content of This Stanza (42:6-10);
 - B. The Chorus of This Dirge (compare verse 5) (42:11).

“Title”:

The references to “the choir director”, i.e., the worship director, and Maschil, a “contemplation” or lesson (see marginal note; compare Psalm 32:1), are not new, but the reference to “the sons of Korah” is.

On the ancestry of “the sons of Korah” (compare Num. 26:10; 1 Chron. 6:16; 2 Chron. 20:19).

A total of 11 Psalms are associated with this group, and 7 of them are found in Book II (Psalms 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49).

These people are probably better regarded as the Levitical performers, rather than the authors of these psalms (i.e., “For the sons of Korah”).

Verses 42:1 – 43:5:

These are teaching psalms from David.

He wrote them when his son Absalom defected.

From David, we learn that hope is most alive when everything seems hopeless.

Psalm 42:1 "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

The word is strong, and expresses that eagerness and fervency of desire, which extreme thirst may be supposed to raise in an animal almost spent in its flight from the pursuing dogs.

Nothing can give us a higher idea of the psalmist’s ardent and inexpressible longing to attend the public worship of God than the burning thirst of such a hunted creature for a cooling and refreshing draught of water.

On this simile from nature, compare (Joel 1:20).

In the psalmist’s estimation, he is facing a severe divine drought.

"So panteth my soul after thee, O God":

Being persecuted by men, and deprived of the word and worship of God, which occasioned a vehement desire after communion with him in his house and ordinances.

Some render the words, "as the field", or "meadow, desires the shower", etc.; or thirsts after it when parched with drought (see Isa. 35:7).

And by these metaphors, one or the other, is expressed the psalmist's violent and eager thirst after the enjoyment of God in public worship.

Those of us who have ever lived around deer know that, the deer comes to the watering hole for a drink of fresh water and sometimes to get the dogs off their trail.

This was written by David, at such a time when he could not just go to worship whenever he wanted to.

He longs for the time when he can spend time in peaceful worship of God.

This was a song sung by what we would call the choir in the church.

These sons of Korah were the singers.

Psalm 42:2 "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

Who is so called, in opposition to the idols of the Gentiles, which were lifeless statues.

And who is the author, giver, and maintainer of natural life.

And who has promised and provided eternal life in his Son.

And is himself the fountain of life, and the fountain of living waters, and a place of broad rivers and streams.

Particularly his lovingkindness, which is better than life.

And is a pure river of water of life, the streams where the saints will be made glad.

And hence it is that the psalmist thirsted after God, and the discoveries of his love.

On this desire for the water of God (compare Psalm 36:8-9; Isa. 41:17; 55:1; Jer. 2:13; 14:1-9; 17:3; John 4:10; 7:37-38; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17). Saying;

"When shall I come and appear before God?":

Meaning, not in heaven, as desiring the beatific vision; but in the tabernacle, where were the worship of God, and the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence.

And where the Israelites appeared before him, even in Zion (see Psalm 84:7).

The soul of all mankind thirsts to worship someone greater than himself.

Matthew 5:6 "Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Notice, that David desires with everything in him for God.

Then he makes the statement "living God".

David knows that God is eternal.

Liveth means continues to live.

The statement “my God” shows us that God is God of individuals.

I believe David is crying out for God to fellowship with him, one on one.

David is not asking for the formality of religion, but the reality of God.

David is even asking God, when can I come to you?

True Christians now are crying, Come quickly Lord Jesus.

Let us look at two more Scriptures on thirsting for righteousness, before we go on.

John 4:13-14 "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:" "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The water that Jesus is speaking of, and the thirst that David had, are both speaking of the Spirit of God.

Psalm 42:3 "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where [is] thy God?"

That is, he could not eat for sorrow, like Hannah (1 Sam. 1:7-8).

Or while he was eating tears fell in plenty.

And they were as common, day and night, as his food, and mixed with it (see Psalm 80:5).

"While they continually say unto me":

His enemies the Philistines.

"Where is thy God?"

Theirs were to be seen and pointed at, as the host of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, and idols of gold, silver, brass, wood, and stone.

Wherefore they ask, where was his? but David's God was invisible.

He is in the heavens, and does what he pleases (Psalm 115:2).

Or the sense is, that if there was such a God he believed in and professed, and he was his servant, surely, he would never have suffered him to fall into so much distress and calamity.

But would have appeared for his relief and deliverance.

And therefore tauntingly, and by way of reproach, ask where he was.

We see that David was serious about his request to God.

He had cried day and night.

The world will never understand about God.

They have eyes to see, and they do not see.

The only time that they will believe in God is when they can see Him with their physical eyes, and then it will be too late.

Psalm 42:4 "When I remember these [things], I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."

"When I remember these things ... I pour out my soul":

Such language also characterizes Jeremiah's Lamentations, indicating a heavy dirge.

On "pour out my soul" or "heart" (compare 1 Sam. 1:15; Psalm 62:8; Lam. 2:19).

These are attempts at trying to unburden oneself from intolerable pain, grief, and agony.

There were three holy days that the Jews were required to keep.

At these times, there were multitudes who gathered and kept the holy day.

Not only did David keep holy days, but Jesus kept them as well.

In fact, Jesus was the Passover Lamb.

These holy days were not times of sorrow, but times of joy.

With each of them, they were to remember a particular blessing of God.

Psalm 42:5 "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and [why] art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him [for] the help of his countenance."

The refrain here breaks in on the song like a sigh, the spirit of dejection struggling against the spirit of faith.

"Cast down":

Better, bowed down, and in the original with a middle sense, "why bowest thou down thyself?"

In this active introspection, the psalmist rebukes himself for his despondency.

"Why art thou cast down?":

Or, Why art thou bowed down?

I.e. brought low, a term indicative of the very extreme of dejection.

"O my soul":

The spirit, or higher reason, rebukes the "soul," or passionate nature, for allowing itself to be so depressed, and seeks to encourage and upraise it.

"Disquieted":

From root kindred to and with the meaning of our word "hum."

The idea of "internal emotion" is easily derivable from its use.

We see the process in such expressions as in (Isaiah 16:11), "My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab."

"Hope thou in God":

For the pardon of sin; for which there is good ground of hope, and so no reason to be cast down on account of it.

For strength against Satan's temptations, which is to be had in Christ, as well as righteousness.

And for the appearance of God, including the discoveries of his love, who has his set time to favor his people.

And therefore, to be hoped, and quietly waited for.

Hope is of great use against castings down.

It is a helmet, an erector of the head, which keeps it upright, and from bowing down.

It is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.

And is of great service in the troubles of life, and against the fears of death.

"For I shall yet praise him":

The time will come when I shall go again to his house, and praise him for his favor toward me.

"For the help of his countenance":

Hebrew; for the salvations of his face.

I.e. for those supports, deliverances, and comforts which I doubt not I shall long enjoy.

Both in his presence and sanctuary, to which he will restore me.

And from his presence, and the light of his countenance, which he will graciously afford to me.

David has been having a pity party.

He has been sick inside, because his friends have turned against him.

Now he asks himself, why art thou cast down, O my soul?

This is a good question.

He then gives himself very good advice, hope in God.

God has not hidden from David.

He will see Him and rejoice.

We ought to think on this as well.

We are not like the world, who have no hope.

We have hope of the resurrection.

In fact, we have promise of the resurrection.

Rejoice and be glad, all ye saints.

Psalm 42:6 "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

"The land of Jordan ... Hermonites ... hill Mizar":

The Jordan and Mt. Hermon notations refer to a location in northern Palestine, an area of headwaters which flow southward.

These locations signal a sharp contrast in the word pictures describing the psalmist's condition; change is imminent.

He is about to move from drought to drowning (compare verse 7).

The location and significance of Mt. Mizar is not known.

King David found himself in a place of discouragement, looking back over the Jordan Valley at what used to be his kingdom and was no longer.

His heart glanced back to "remember" the history of the great God he served (77:10-20).

Even though David is not near the holy mountain, he will not forget God.

He will worship God where he is.

We might look at that and learn.

Wherever we are, we can pray and meet with God.

It does not have to be just in church.

In fact, God likes for us to pray to Him when no one but Him hears.

Psalm 42:7 "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

By which are meant afflictions, comparable to the deep waters of the sea, for their multitude and overwhelming nature (see Psalm 69:1).

These came pouring down, one after another, upon the psalmist.

As soon as one affliction was over, another came, as in the case of Job.

Which is signified by one calling to another, and were clamorous, troublesome, and very grievous and distressing.

"All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me":

With which he seemed to be covered and overwhelmed, as a ship is at sea.

It may be observed, that the psalmist calls afflictions God's water spouts, and "his" waves and "his" billows.

Because they are appointed, sent, ordered, and overruled by him, and made to work for the good of his people.

And now, though these might seem to be a just cause of dejection, yet they were not, as appears from (Psalm 42:8).

“Deep ... thy waterspouts ... thy billows”:

He is alleging that God is ultimately responsible for the oceans of trial in which he seems now to be drowning.

David at this point, is feeling desperate.

He is fearful that all of the forces are against him.

He is saying, the waves are getting too high, I am about to go under.

Peter felt this same panic, when he tried to walk on the water to Jesus.

He started looking at the waves and then forgot that he had already been walking on the water toward Jesus.

We must not look at the circumstances.

Sure the water might be getting high, but Jesus reached out His hand to Peter and raised him up.

He will do the same for us, if we will reach out for His help.

Psalm 42:8 "[Yet] the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song [shall be] with me, [and] my prayer unto the God of my life."

“The LORD will command his lovingkindness”:

This statement of confidence interrupts his laments (compare their continuance in verses 9-10), providing a few gracious gulps of divine “air” that is under the cascading inundations of his trial and tormentors.

When people worship and praise God, they become aware of His magnificence.

Suddenly, the circumstances of life begin to pale when compared to the greatness of God.

Peter cried for help, and Jesus helped him.

David puts his faith in God, and God is there in the day and in the night to help him.

Are you about to sink in the problems of this life?

Reach out and Jesus will help you.

Pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, and He will answer your prayers.

Help is as near as your next prayer.

Psalm 42:9 "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

A name frequently given to the eternal God, Father, Son, and Spirit (Deut. 32:4 and see notes on Psalm 18:2).

"Why hast thou forgotten me?" (See notes on Psalm 13:1).

"Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?":

Meaning that Saul; though it may be applied to any spiritual enemy, sin, Satan, and the world.

Who are very oppressive and afflicting, and occasion continual mourning to the children of God.

David calls Him the Rock; why does he not stand on that Rock instead of thinking God has forgotten him?

David is looking at the oppression of the enemy, instead of standing fast upon the Rock.

People, I say one more time, don't look at the waves rising around you, keep your eyes on Jesus.

Stand fast on the Rock and the storms of life will not shake you.

Psalm 42:10 "[As] with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where [is] thy God?"

The reproaches of his enemies were as daggers struck into his bones.

Or, according to others, as blows that crushed his bones (LXX; which is the Greek Septuagint).

So keenly did he feel them.

"While they say daily unto me, where is thy God? (See note on Psalm 42:3).

The enemy is there day after day, but plant your roots deep like the oak tree.

When the wind blows with all of this doubt, just dig deeper with your roots.

Trust God and even this will pass.

Psalm 42:11 "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, [who is] the health of my countenance, and my God."

The same expostulation (as in Psalm 42:5); and so is what follows.

"And why art thou disquieted within me?":

And the same argument and means are made use of to remove dejection and disquietude.

"Hope thou in God":

For I shall yet praise him (see notes on Psalm 42:5).

To which is added a new argument, taken from the grace and goodness of God, and covenant interest in him.

"Who is the health of my countenance, and my God":

As the bodily health of man is seen in the countenance, and for the most part to be judged by it.

So is the spiritual health of the saints, and which they have from the LORD.

When he, as the sun of righteousness, arises upon them with healing in his wings, he, by his gracious presence, makes their countenances cheerful.

Fills them with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and causes them to lift up their heads with a holy boldness and confidence.

And without shame and fear: or as it may be rendered, who "is the salvation of my countenance".

That is, who is or will be the author of full and complete salvation to me.

Which will be so public and open, so clear and manifest, as to be beheld by myself and others.

And this the psalmist mentions, in order to remove his present dejections.

And besides, this is God of salvation he believed was his covenant God, and would be so even unto death.

And therefore, he had no just reason to be dejected and disquieted.

It sounds to me, as if David is preaching himself a sermon.

I might ask too, why are you cast down David "beloved of God"?

David knows that he has no reason to doubt God.

God has always protected him, and He will not stop now.

He finishes this lament in a positive note.

God is not far from my face.

He is my God.

He is my help in time of need.

Psalm 42 Questions

1. In verse 1 David compared himself to what animal?
2. What was the animal panting for?
3. What are two reasons why deer comes to the watering hole?
4. Who were the singers in verse 1?
5. What did David call God in verse 2?
6. What is meant by, living God?
7. What does the statement “my God” show us?
8. David is not looking for the formality of religion, but the _____ _ _ _ _.
9. What are true Christians crying out to God now?
10. What is the water that Jesus was speaking of in John 4:14?
11. What did David say had been his meat day and night?
12. When will the world believe in God?
13. How many holy days were the Jews required to keep?
14. Who was the Passover Lamb?
15. What very good question did David ask himself in verse 5?
16. What was the very good advice David gave himself?

17. What is the hope of the believer?
18. What lesson can we Christians learn from verse 6 speaking of Jordan and the other places?
19. What is David fearful of in verse 7?
20. Are you about to sink in the problems of this life?
21. If you answered yes to the last question, what are you going to do about it?
22. What is David doing, instead of standing on the Rock?
23. How steadfastly are we to stand when the storm blows against us?
24. What does the author believe David is doing in verse 11?