

Psalm 42 - 43

Title: Longing for God

Author and Date: The Sons of Korah

Key Verses: Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5

Type: Lament

Outline

- A. Longing for God's presence (42:1-5).
- B. Longing for God's loving-kindness (42:6-11).
- C. Longing for God's help (43:1-5).

Notes

Title: "For the Chief Musician." See the notes on Psalm 4. "Maschil of the sons of Korah." A "maschil" is a psalm of meditation (contemplation) or instruction (see the notes on Psalm 32). The following psalms have this title: Psalm 32, 42-45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142. The "sons of Korah" were descendents of Korah (Num. 16:1ff; 26:11). They were Levites who had duties involving the music of the temple (1 Chron. 6:31-37; 25:4-31). They may have been the author or musical performers of these two psalms. The following psalms have this title: Psalm 42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88.

Summary: Psalm 42 describes a man who is depressed and cast down, but who also longs for God (verses 1-2). The psalmist is cast down and feels forgotten because he is oppressed and overwhelmed by adversaries who reproach him (verses 3, 7, and 9-10). The psalmist may have been on the run in exile from his enemies (possibly in northern Palestine, verse 6), but he carries with him fond memories of God and of happier days when he worshipped God (verses 4 and 6). In the midst of his troubles, the psalmist trusts in God (42:5, 8, 11; 43:5).

Psalm 42 and 43 are separate in the MT, the LXX, and in our Bibles. However, Psalm 43, which has no heading, may have been originally connected with Psalm 42. Note how the repeated refrain "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" ties the two psalms together (42:5, 11; 43:5). Compare also 42:9 with 43:2, and 42:2,4 with 43:3-4. Psalm 43 opens with the psalmist's desire for the Lord's vindication, defense, and deliverance from ungodly, deceitful and unjust men (verses 1-2). He wants to be led by God back to Jerusalem to worship God like he had done before (verses 3-4; see 42:4). The psalmist closes by expressing his trust in God (verse 5; see 42:5, 11).

- 42:1-2 - The psalmist describes himself as panting and thirsting for God (Psa. 63:1). The “hart” (KJV, ASV) is a stag or male deer (Joel 1:20). “God” is used frequently in Psalm 42 (each verse except verse 7) and 43 (each verse except verse 3) to describe deity.
- 42:3 - The question, “Where is your God?” is asked by the psalmist’s adversaries and is repeated in verse 10. It is a question that is meant to taunt, to hurt, and to cause doubt in the mind of the psalmist. It is a question that is meant to shake the faith of the psalmist.
- 42:5 - The main thoughts of this verse are repeated in verse 11 and in 43:5. The psalmist is discouraged and troubled on the one hand, but hopeful on the other. “My God” is added at the end of verse 11. “Disquieted” means “troubled,” “disturbed” (NIV, NASV) or “upset” (NET); to be in “turmoil” (ESV, HCSB). Jesus speaks in a similar way in Matthew 26:38.
- 42:6 - “The land of the Jordan” is the land near the headwaters of the Jordan River. “The Hermons” (or “hermonites”, KJV) is a reference to the area near Mt. Hermon in the far northern part of Palestine near the town of Dan (Deut. 3:8). The location of “the hill Mizar” (or “the little mountain”) is unknown but it was probably located somewhere in the foothills of Mt. Hermon. Northern Palestine, away from Jerusalem, may have been the place where the psalmist fled to escape his enemies and troubles.
- 42:7 - The psalmist feels overwhelmed with depression and trouble like billowing waves of water covering him (Psa. 69:1-2; 88:7). We would say that we are “snowed under” or “buried” with trouble. Compare these words with the words of Jonah (Jon. 2:3).
- 42:8 - “Jehovah” or “Lord” (Heb. *Yahweh*) is used only here; elsewhere, “God” is used. For a song in the night, see Job 35:10.
- 42:10 - The psalmist feels crushed by his enemies’ reproach.
- 43:1 - The psalmist requests vindication. He appeals to God as his Judge and Advocate.
- 43:3,4 - “Light” and “truth” are symbols of divine guidance (Psa. 4:6; 36:9; 44:3; 89:15). “Thy holy hill”, “thy tabernacles”, and “the altar of God” are references to worship in the temple, the house of God, in Jerusalem (see 42:4).

Questions

1. How does the psalmist describe his longing for God (42:1)?

2. What question does the psalmist ask (42:2)?

3. What question do the psalmist’s adversaries ask him while he is tearful (42:3)?

4. Where does the psalmist remember going (42:4)?
5. What questions does the psalmist ask himself and what does he do with God (42:5, 11)?
6. What does the psalmist do when he is cast down and where does he do it (42:6)?
7. How does the psalmist describe his overwhelming troubles (42:7)?
8. What will the psalmist continue to do during his troubles (42:8)?
9. How does the psalmist describe God and what questions does the psalmist ask (42:9)?
10. How does the psalmist describe his adversaries' reproach toward him (42:10)?
11. What request does the psalmist have for God (43:1)?
12. How does the psalmist describe God and what questions does the psalmist ask (43:2)?
13. What does the psalmist ask God for and where does he want to be led (43:3)?
14. What does the psalmist want to do at the altar of God (43:4)?
15. What questions does the psalmist ask himself and what does he do with God (43:5)?

Applications for Today

1. What deep desire or longing, if any, do we have in our heart? Is it longing for God (42:1-2)? What water do we need (Jn. 4:10; 6:35)? What was Paul's desire (Rom. 10:1; Phil. 1:23)? What was Paul's "one thing" (Phil. 3:13-14)? What did Paul long for (2 Cor. 5:2)?
2. Enemies will taunt the righteous with questions that are meant to hurt. They will question the existence of our God, saying "Where is your God?" (42:3, 10). What answer to this question is given in Psalm 115:2-3 and 139:7-10? What did Jesus' enemies say to him while he was on the cross (Mt. 27:43)?
3. It is good to have fond memories of coming to worship God and a desire to return for worship (42:2, 4, 6; 43:3-4). What are we not to forsake (Heb. 10:25)?
4. It is good to hope in God, praise God, and remember God when you are cast down (42:5-6, 11; 43:5). What are we to do with God in times of trouble (1 Pet. 5:7)?
5. Let us be led by the light and truth of God's guiding word (43:3). What are we to walk in (1 Jn. 1:6-8; 2 Jn. 4)?
6. When we are dejected, discouraged, depressed, and despondent, remember that God is living (42:2), God is hope (42:5, 11; 43:5), and God is light and truth (43:3). Remember, God is "my God" (42:6), "my life" (42:8), "my rock" (42:9), "my cause" (43:1), "my strength" (43:2), and "my exceeding joy" (43:4). What reminder about God did Paul give suffering Christians in Romans 8:31-39? What promise concerning God is given in Hebrews 13:5? What picture of God is given to suffering Christians in the book of Revelation (4:8, 11; 7:12; 11:17; 15:3; etc.)?