

PSALMS

Chapter 42

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” ⁴These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. ⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation ⁶and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ⁷Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. ⁸By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” ¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” ¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

Ps 42–43 A prayer for deliverance from being “oppressed by the enemy” (42:9; 43:2) and for restoration to the presence of God at his temple. That these two psalms form a single prayer (though they are counted as two psalms also in the Septuagint) is evident from its unique structure (see below) and the development of common themes. Ps 43 may have come to be separated from Ps 42 for a particular liturgical purpose. The speaker may have been a leading member of the Korahites whose normal duties involved him in the liturgical activities of the temple. It may be that the “ungodly nation” (43:1) referred to was the Arameans of Damascus and that the author had been taken captive by the Arameans during one of their incursions into Judah, such as that of Hazael (see 2Ki 12:17–18). (This attack by Hazael affected especially the area in which the Korahites, descendants of Kohath, had been assigned cities; see Jos 21:4, 9–19.) This psalm begins Book II of the Psalter, a collection that is distinguished from Book I primarily by the fact that the Hebrew word for “God” (*Elohim*) predominates, whereas in the first book the Hebrew word for “the LORD” (*Yahweh*) predominates. (CSB)

Structurally, the three stanzas of this psalm are symmetrical (each contains four verses), and each is followed by the same refrain (42:5, 11; 43:5). The middle stanza, however, has at its center (see note on 6:6) an additional verse (42:8) that interrupts the developing thought and injects a note of confidence, such as comes to expression also in the threefold refrain. Apart from the refrains, the prayer is framed by an expression of longing for God’s presence (42:1) and a vow to praise God at his altar (43:4). For other psalms with recurring refrains see Ps 46; 49; 59; 80; 107. (CSB)

Ps 42 and 43 appear separately, but are connected by a common refrain and lament (42:5, 11 and 43:5; 42:9 and 43:2). The connection is reinforced because Ps 43 has no superscription. The two psalms form three cycles focused on intense yearning for God and communion with Him at the temple. In distress, the psalmist wishes only for the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord’s earthly location. Luther: “[The psalmist] desires to come to God’s house and be comforted by the face of God... For God’s house is that place where God’s Word is, and God’s face is His presence, through which He makes Himself known and by means of His Word, reveals His grace” (*PIML*, pp 58–59). *Maskil*. See p 841 (Skilled or artistic piece). *Sons of Korah*. Descendants of Levi, temple musicians (1Ch 6:1, 22, 31). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, longing for God; vv 5–6a, refrain of hope; vv 6b–10, life in exile; v 11, refrain of hope. (TLSB)

Most of us have experienced times when our feelings battled with our faith. We know God’s promises and His care for our lives. Yet, we can find ourselves filled with despair over disappointments and worries. In Psalms 42 and 43, fear continues to battle with faith. The resolution isn’t so simple or quick. Our lives can sometimes seem like a roller coaster as we struggle to face our troubles with confidence in God’s help. The psalmist expresses this roller-coaster of ongoing emotion in these psalms. Many scholars consider these two psalms to be a single lament. (LL)

42 title *For the director of music.* See note on Ps 4 title. (CSB)

maskil The Hebrew word perhaps indicates that these psalms contain instruction in godliness. (CSB)

Scholars think this may be a musical term or it may denote a psalm written to bring wisdom or advice to the hearer. (PBC)

of the Sons of Korah. Or “for the Sons of Korah”; see “For Jeduthun” in Ps 39 title. “Sons of Korah” refers to the Levitical choir made up of the descendants of Korah appointed by David to serve in the temple liturgy. The Korahites represented the Levitical family of Kohath son of Levi. Their leader in the days of David was Heman (see Ps 88 title)—just as Asaph led the choir of the Gershonites and Jeduthun (Ethan) the choir of the Merarites. This is the first of a collection of seven psalms ascribed to the “Sons of Korah” (Ps 42–49); four more occur in Book III (Ps 84–85; 87–88). (CSB)

These men were from the tribe of Levi whom King David appointed to serve as a choir. (PBC)

42:1–4 Longing to be with God at the temple. (CSB)

Stanza One – Longing for the Temple (PBC)

In this stanza longing and sorrow predominate. Hope is confined largely to the refrain. It is difficult for us to understand the intense longing Israel had for the temple in Jerusalem, since our worship is not so attached to one city or one building. But the sacrifices and many of the most important religious celebrations of OT worship could only be celebrated in the temple. So to be cut off from the temple was to be denied participation in some of the most meaningful and important parts of worship. That is why a believer who longed for God as intensely as a thirsty deer long for water would intensely desire to reach the city of Jerusalem and its temple. (PBC)

42:1 *deer pants for flowing streams* – Because its life depends on water—especially when being pressed by hunters, as the psalmist was by his oppressors. (CSB)

Psalmist desires worship in God’s house, where God’s presence preserves his life. (Cf Jn 7:37–39, Jesus in the temple.) “As a deer with anxious and trembling eagerness strains toward a fresh, flowing stream, so I yearn anxiously and trembling for God’s Word” (BEC 33). (TLSB)

Imagine the pain you would feel at not being able to take Holy Communion or sing praises with other believers for months or years. How sad that we often do not appreciate the opportunity to worship until we lose it. (LL)

soul – In this verse refers to the psalmist’s entire being, equivalent to the personal pronoun “I.”). (CSB)

42:2 *living God*. See Dt 5:26. (CSB)

No idol of metal or wood, but the giver of life. (TLSB)

When ... ? Circumstances (see v. 9; 43:1–2) now prevent him from being at the temple. (CSB)

Something has happened to prevent him from going to the sanctuary of God as he had been wont to do in times past. (Leupold)

appear before God – Enter his presence to commune with him (see Ex 19:17; 29:42–43; 30:6, 36). (CSB)

Israel’s worship was entry into God’s presence, located in His earthly sanctuary. All male Israelites were required to worship together three times each year (Ex 23:17; Dt 16:16). (TLSB)

42:3 *day and night*. See vv. 8, 10. (CSB)

they – Enemies who ridicule both God and His people. (TLSB)

Where is your God? The arrogance with which the wicked speak (see 17:10), especially their easy dismissal of God’s knowledge of their evil acts and his unfailing prosecution of their malicious deeds, is frequently noted by the psalmists. (CSB)

42:4 *lead... the procession* – Suggests that the author normally had a leading role in the liturgy of the temple. (CSB)

Suggests past leadership in the temple liturgy that he longs to repeat. (TLSB)

keeping festival – The throngs of people were making their pilgrimage to the sanctuary to keep the feasts (the word refers to a sacrificial pilgrimage). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

42:5-6 This refrain captures the reality of faith: sorrow amid trials, yet certainty in God’s care. (TLSB)

42:5 *why are in turmoil within me* – It is as if to say: All your past experience adds up to this, that God has not withdrawn from you nor abandoned you. (Leupold)

Conversing with his soul, the psalmist recognizes intense grief (vv 6, 11; 43:5). Consider Christ in Gethsemane (Mt 26:38). Jerome: “Never let suggestions of evil grow on you ... Slay the enemy while he is small ... nip the evil in the bud” (NPNF 2 6:24). (TLSB)

hope in God – That is to say, build on him, rest on him even though for the present he gives no tokens of accepting you or even of hearing you. (Leupold)

Self-admonition to trust in God during exile and sorrows. (TLSB)

At times in life, we too need to let our faith inform our feelings. We may face distressing circumstances, and yet we can know the Lord is in control and is working for our good whether we feel it or not. We need not despair, for God is near. (LL)

praise him – For his saving help – Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God’s saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple; see also 43:4). (CSB)

42:6–10 Stanza Two – Remembrance of the Lord (PBC)

This stanza continues the lament at being cut off from Jerusalem and at the taunts of the enemy who mock the psalmist’s God. The waves that sweep over the psalmist may refer to the falls and rapids of the upper Jordan, but here they are a figure for the sorrows that overwhelm him. Although the psalmist’s dismay throughout this stanza, the sorrow is broken by the interlude of hope in verse 5. It is very likely that this word of faith and hope was deliberately placed in the middle of the middle stanza of the double psalm. (PBC)

The cause and depth of the trouble of his soul. (CSB)

42:6 *soul is cast down* – When we are overwhelmed by sorrow, it will be helpful to ask ourselves the psalmist’s question. Talking to ourselves and reminding ourselves of the promises of God can help us put our sorrows into perspective. We should ask ourselves, “Is such depression really necessary if God is still in control of things? Will such sorrow do any good? Can it make things any better? Is it not better to hope in God and trust His promises? Like the psalmist, we may have to struggle long and repeat the same truths over and over again in order to conquer our sorrows and depressions, like him, we should struggle and persevere until God’s light and truth guide us into His presence. (PBC)

therefore I will remember you – As he remembers (v. 4) in his exile the joy of his past intimacy with God, so now in his exile he remembers God and painfully wonders (vv. 7, 9–10), yet not without hope (v. 8). (But some believe that the clause should be rendered “because I remember you.”) (CSB)

The psalmist frankly lays this issue before the Lord himself. He is on the way to recovery in the very moment he does so. (Leupold)

Hermon – Psalmist’s temporary home (he may be in exile) at the source of the Jordan River, beyond the northern border of Israel. (TLSB)

Mount Mizar – Probably indicating that the author speaks from exile outside the contemporary boundaries of Israel and Judah. Some think the author locates himself at Mount Mizar (a small peak or village, not otherwise known) on the flanks of Mount Hermon somewhere near the headwaters of the Jordan. Others translate the Hebrew for “from” as “far from” and understand “the land of the Jordan” to refer to the promised land (which lies along the Jordan and from which the author was separated). The mention of “the heights of Hermon” may then be a reference to the high peak that marked the northern border of the land (see Dt 3:8; Jos 11:17; 13:11; 1Ch 5:23) and looked down upon it (see 133:3; SS 4:8). Some have suggested that “Mount Mizar” is an additional reference to “the heights of Hermon,” calling that high peak the “little mountain” (literal translation) in comparison with Mount Zion (see 68:15–16). (CSB)

Lit, “hill of littleness”; location unknown. (TLSB)

42:7 *roar of your waterfalls*. Often taken to be an allusion to the cascading waters of the upper Jordan as they rush down from Mount Hermon. It is more likely, however, that this is a literary allusion to the “waterfalls” by which the waters from God’s storehouse of water above—the “deep” above—pour down into the streams and rivers that empty into the seas—the “deep” below. It pictures the great distress the author suffers, and the imagery is continued in the following reference to God’s “waves and breakers” sweeping over him (see 69:1–2; 88:7; Jnh 2:3, 5). God’s hand is involved in the psalmist’s suffering, at least to the extent that he has allowed this catastrophe. He seems to the psalmist to have “forgotten” (v. 9)—to have “rejected” (43:2)—him. But he makes no link between this and any sin in his life (see Ps 44; 77). (CSB)

Imagery of thirsting for water in vv 1–2 changes to that of God-sent floods that overwhelm. (TLSB)

42:8 The center: confession of hope in all the trouble. That is, “Day-and-night [cf. v. 3] the LORD directs his love, and his song is with me.” (CSB)

the LORD – Only here at the center in this psalm. (CSB)

commands his steadfast love – Sends forth his love, like a messenger to do his will (see 43:3). (CSB)

he Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

This truth gives anchorage to this troubled soul. (Leupold)

Psalm centers on this hope in the middle of every trouble. (TLSB)

his song – Perhaps this very psalm, which declares the Lord’s mercies. (TLSB)

Perhaps this very psalm, which declares the Lord’s mercies. (TLSB)

Another factor that he earnestly believes in is that during the watches of the dark night God will give him such assurance that he will be enabled to voice his confidence in God in song and make a prayer to the God of his life. (Leupold)

prayer – praise and prayer belong together in the thought of the psalmist. (CSB)

42:9 Echoed in 43:2. (CSB)

my rock – “Rock” is a common poetic figure for God (or the gods: Dt 32:31, 37; Isa 44:8), symbolizing his unfailing (see Isa 26:4) strength as a fortress refuge. (CSB)

forgotten me – Desperate but confident prayer; psalmist asks if God has abandoned him, though he knows He has not. (TLSB)

The effect of God’s failure to act is that the psalmist is suffering. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

Why ... ? Why ... ? It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

42:10 *deadly wound – Blasphemous mockery cuts the psalmist painfully. (TLSB)*

bones –As the inner skeleton, they here represent the whole body. (CSB)

The expression is literally “with a breaking in my bones.” (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

42:11 *hope in God* – Emphatic repetition of vv 5–6; through sorrow and turmoil, our God is the true Savior. (TLSB)

Ps 42 The psalmist experiences despair at the seeming victory of the godless and his separation from God’s merciful presence at the temple. We, too, should desire God’s presence, hear His Word in public worship, and receive the salvation that He gives in the Word. In the midst of our suffering and troubles, and against all appearances to the contrary, our Lord Jesus is our Savior and dwells among us in preaching and Communion to save us. • O living God, I thirst for Your mercy. Answer my prayer, for You are my salvation. Amen. (TLSB)