

## PSALM 42

### LONGING FOR GOD

AUTHOR: Anonymous

INTRODUCTION: The superscription does not identify the author of Psalm 42, but it indicates it was delivered "To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah". "Maschil" is a transliterated Hebrew word meaning *instruction*. The "sons of Korah" were Levites (Num16:1). Korah led a rebellion against the authority of Moses during the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites (Num16:1-3), and died in a supernatural judgment from God (Num16:32-25). The "sons of Korah", however, did not die in their father's judgment and continued (cf. Num26:9-11); eventually they became renowned in Israel for their leadership in singing and praising the LORD (cf. superscriptions to Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). Though Psalm 43 does not have a superscription, Psalms 42 and 43 form a unit and are joined by a common refrain (Cp., Ps42:5,11; 43:5).

The Kohathites (which included "the sons of Korah"; cf. Num16:1) were assigned (in part) Levitical cities in the tribal region of Dan (cf. Josh21:5), which is significant for two reasons. First, Dan was the tribal territory to the extreme north, such that the Israelite who dwelt in Dan was the farthest away from Jerusalem and the Temple (which represented the presence of God). Second, the territory of Dan included Bashan (Deut33:22) and bordered **Mount Hermon** (Josh13:11; cf. Ps23:6), an area steeped in pagan worship and populated with pagan temples from ancient times even till the time of Christ (Matt16:13). Thus, the Israelite living in Dan felt closer to pagan gods than he did to "the living God" (Ps42:2). This is the context in which the psalmist longs to be in the presence of his God.

- [1] A "hart" is a male deer, stag, buck. For the deer that has run long to escape a predator, its one overriding desire/need is to drink from cool "water brooks"; so is the one desire/need of the Israelite immersed in paganism to be near to God. For the psalmist, to "appear before God" necessitated him to enter the Temple, which was the "house of God" (v4); for the Israelite living in Dan, God was far from him. Contrast this with the reality that in the Church Age, the believer is the "the temple of God" (1Cor3:16); thus, he is ever in the presence of God. The desire of the O.T. saint to be nearer to God is realized in the Body of Christ.
- [2] The characterization "living God" was used in the confessions by Peter (Matt16:16) and all the disciples of Christ (Jn6:69), as well as the Apostle Paul (1Tim3:15; 4:10; 6:17) and the writer to the Hebrews (Heb3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22). It seems to be an appellation denoting intimate relationship, in contrast to the pagan's stale relationship with idols (cf. 2Cor6:16).
- [3] Unbelieving pagans mock the psalmist's longing for intimacy with his unseen God, "Where is thy God?" (Cp., 2Pet3:3-4). Yet, the believer has the promise that our God will never leave nor forsake us (Cp., Josh1:5; Matt28:20; Heb13:5).
- [4] The "house of God" refers to the Temple, the dwelling place of God during Israel's dispensations (1Kgs8:10-12); "holyday" refers to the Feasts of the LORD, when Israelites were required to travel to the Temple in order to "appear before God" (v2; cf. Deut16:16). The

psalmist fondly "remember[s]" those occasions on which he travelled "with a multitude" of his kinsmen to attend feast days in Jerusalem and at the Temple.

- [5] The psalmist describes his "soul" (i.e., the inner man) as "cast down" and "disquieted" (i.e., lacking peace and tranquility). His "hope" is in "God", where "hope" is the belief in/reliance upon the yet unfulfilled promises of God (cf. Rom4:18-21). The O.T. saint's hope for intimacy with God was not possible under the Mosaic covenant, but had to await the New covenant inaugurated by the work of Christ (cf. Jer31:33-34; Ezek36:24-28; Matt26:28). The O.T. saints died in faith, having not "yet" received their promises (cf. Heb11:13,39).
- [6] Note, the place from which the psalmist writes is "the Hermons" (i.e., the peaks of Hermon), and "from the hill, Mizar" (i.e., apparently parallelism, a particular peak in the Hermon range). This is a region steeped in ancient paganism, and according to 1 Enoch 6:1-8 it was ground zero for the angelic incursion into the antediluvian world (cf. Gen6:2,4).
- [7] Snowmelt from Mount Hermon fed the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. "Deep" may be an allusion to what later became known as the "cave of Pan", inside of which was a seemingly bottomless pit, which the pagans believed was an entrance to **Hades** (Cp., Matt16:18).
- [8] Here, "loving-kindness" is a translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*, which denotes commitment within a covenant relationship. When used relative to the Israelites, it has the Abrahamic covenant in view. The psalmist finds solace in the unconditional promises God has made to the descendants of Abraham (cf. Gen12:1-3). In his use of "Yet" (also v5), he recognizes that the fulfillment of these promises is in the future.
- [9] The very long time between the giving of the promises (i.e., the Abrahamic covenant) and the fulfillment of the promises (i.e., the entering of Israel into the New covenant) has the appearance that God has "forgotten" the Israelite (cf. 2Pet2:8); time and trials serve to test the faith and hope of the believer (cf. 1Pet1:6-13). Note, in the O.T., "God" is the "rock"; in the N.T., Christ is the "rock" (Cp., Matt16:18; 1Cor10:4; 1Pet1:6-8).
- [10] The unrelenting refrain coming from the "enemies" (Cp., "scoffers"; 2Pet3:3) of God and His people, "Where is thy God?", is like a "sword" in the "bones" of the psalmist.
- [11] The psalm ends by repeating the refrain of v5 (also Ps43:5). That God is the "health" of the psalmist's "countenance" is an allusion to the Aaronic blessing (Num6:24-27).