

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 42 — Thirsting for God

1.0 Introducing Psalm 42

- Beginning with Psalm 42, a different author is encountered for the first time: “the sons of Korah.” Note the following comparisons between Books I and II:

	Book I (Psalms 1–41)	Book II (Psalms 42–72)
By David	37	18
By Others	0	9 = 7 by Sons of Korah + 1 by Asaph + 1 by Solomon
Anonymous	4 (Pss 1, 2, 10, 33)	4 (Pss 43, 66, 67, 71)
Names of God	Yahweh (LORD): 272x Elohim (God): 15x	Yahweh (LORD): 30x Elohim (God): 164x

- Psalms 42 and 43 are often considered together.
 - ◆ A number of Hebrew manuscripts join them as one psalm.
 - ◆ Only Psalms 43 and 71 in Book II lack a psalm heading.
 - ◆ A refrain found twice in Psalm 42 (vv. 5, 11) is also found in Psalm 43 (v. 5).
 - ◆ Psalm 42:9 is echoed in Psalm 43:2.
- “The sons of Korah” (or, Korahites):
 - ◆ They were descendants of Kohath in the tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:22-28; 9:17-32) who were assigned responsibilities for the Tabernacle and the Temple.
 - ◆ One of their Temple ministries was the performance of music (1 Chronicles 6:31-43; 2 Chronicles 20:19).
 - ◆ Korah led a rebellion against Moses in the wilderness and God destroyed him and all those who followed him (Numbers 16), but his sons survived (26:10-11; apparently they had not joined their father in his rebellion).

2.0 Reading Psalm 42 (NAU)

A Maskil of the sons of Korah.

- 42:1** As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
- 42:2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?
- 42:3** My tears have been my food day and night,
While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
- 42:4** These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me.
For I used to go along with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
- 42:5** **Why are you in despair, O my soul?**
And why have you become disturbed within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him
For the help of His presence.
- 42:6** O my God, my soul is in despair within me;
Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan
And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.
- 42:7** Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls;
All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.
- 42:8** The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime;
And His song will be with me in the night,
A prayer to the God of my life.
- 42:9** I will say to God my rock, “Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression
of the enemy?”
- 42:10** As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me,
While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
- 42:11** **Why are you in despair, O my soul?**
And why have you become disturbed within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 42

3.1 Outline for Psalms 42–43

- I. The Psalmist’s Introspection (42:1-5)
- II. The Psalmist’s Retrospection (42:6-11)
- III. The Psalmist’s Vindication (43:1-5)



3.2 Notes

- **Heading: “A Maskil”**
 - This is the second occurrence of this term in a psalm heading.
 - It occurs in the headings to thirteen psalms: Psalms 32, 42, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142.
 - The meaning is best taken as an artistically molded song in keeping with the principles of wisdom. See the use of *maskil* in Psalm 47:7 and in 2 Chronicles 30:22 (ESV: “who showed good skill”).

- **v. 2 “the living God”**
 - Is this title a contrast to lifeless idols or a reference to the psalmist’s source of life?
 - Note verse 8, “the God of my life.”
 - Compare verse 2b: “When shall I come and appear before God?”
 - God is the ultimate source of the psalmist’s life in both its content and its quality.

- **vv. 3, 10 “Where is your God?”**
 - Occurring twice, there is a degree of emphasis on this question from the psalmist’s taunters.
 - In a society where virtually no one was an atheist, this was a particularly hurtful question.
 - Its meaning is “Where’s your God when you need him? Is He really of any use?”

- **vv. 5, 11 “Why are you in despair, O my soul?”**
 - The psalmist is experiencing depression.
 - What are the symptoms of his depression?
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 - What are the things that are involved in curing his depression?
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- **v. 6 “Therefore I remember You”**
 - Remembrance in the biblical sense is more than just a reference to memory.
 - It is a recall that calls one to action based upon that recall.
 - Forgetfulness, on the other hand, involves resisting or rejecting what is recalled, resulting in inaction.



- v. 6 “Mount Mizar”
 - “Mizar” means “little hill” or “little mountain.”
 - Mizar was probably one of the lesser peaks in the Mt. Hermon range.
 - Perhaps the psalmist is in that region or remembers his visit(s) to that region at the headwaters of the Jordan River.
- v. 7 “deep ... waterfalls ... breakers ... waves”
 - The metaphor of overwhelming water and flood depicts the psalmist’s sense of despair and need for help.
- v. 8 “The LORD will command His lovingkindness”
 - “In the midst of the drowning flood, God throws the psalmist a lifeline. ... His thrashing hand grips the line of God’s ‘love [*hesed*]’ (42:8), God’s faithful, committed, covenant love that endures forever.” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 673.
 - “It is no accident that here alone in this first psalm of the Elohist Psalter, the name of Israel’s covenant God, Yahweh (‘LORD’), appears. It is as if the two belong together; Yahweh and *hesed* cannot be separated.” — Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, 673.



4.0 Singing Psalm 42

Sweet Place

(Tune: “Rejoice, the Lord Is King”)

Sweet place, sweet place alone!
The court of God most high,
The heaven of heavens, the throne
Of spotless majesty!

Refrain:
O happy place!
When shall I be, my God, with Thee,
To see Thy face?

The stranger homeward bends,
And sigheth for his rest:
Heaven is my home, my friends
Lodge there in Abraham’s breast.

Earth’s but a sorry tent,
Pitched but a few frail days,
A short leased tenement;
Heaven’s still my song, my praise.

No tears from any eyes
Drop in that holy choir:
But death itself there dies,
And sighs themselves expire.

There should temptations cease,
My frailties there should end.
There should I rest in peace
In the arms of my best friend.

The patriarchs of old
There from their travels cease:
The prophets there behold
Their longed for Prince of peace.

— Words: Samuel Crossman (1664)
Music: John Darwall (1773)

As the Deer

As the deer panteth for the water,
So my soul longeth after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to Worship You.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to Worship You.*

You're my friend, and You are my brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything.

I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye.

— Martin Nystrom

5.0 Praying Psalm 42

- My soul thirsts for You, O God.. [v. 2]
- My hope is in You, Lord. [v. 5]
- Help me to remember all that You have done for me. [v. 6]
- Father, may Your song be with me in my troubled nights. [v. 8]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 42

- The primary remedy for depression is to gain control of our memories by focusing on what God has done for me.
- Hope in a time of despair must be centered on God alone.

Hope "is the grace that swims, though the waves roar and be troubled."
"In the garden of hope grow the laurels for future victories, the roses of coming joy, the lilies of approaching peace."

— C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 1/2:272, 273.