



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 42

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# Introduction

- This psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of the sons of Korah*
- The Jews divided the book of psalms into 5 sections but there is no knowledge of when they were divided into five books
- This is the first Psalm of Book Two
- In Book Two of Psalms, David authored more than half of the Psalms
- But now, other psalmists appear like Asaph, the sons of 'Korah' and King Solomon
- *The sons of Korah* were Levites, from the family of Kohath



# Introduction

- By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19)
- Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers 16)
- God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, but the sons of Korah remained (Numbers 26:9-11)
- Some scholars claim that *the sons of Korah* wrote this Psalm
- Although David's name is not mentioned as the author, this Psalm bears the characters of David's style and experience
- *To the chief musician* This Psalm was directed for them to sing, for they were not the authors of it, as some have thought



# Introduction

- But David himself composed it; and it seems to have been written by him, not as representing the captives in Babylon, but on his own account, when he was persecuted by Saul, and driven out by men from abiding in the Lord's inheritance, and was in a strange land among the Heathen, where he was reproached by them; and everything in this psalm agrees with his state and condition
- Or, rather when he fled from his son Absalom, and was in those parts beyond Jordan, mentioned in this psalm; 2 Samuel 17:24
- And according to some, few of the children of Korah were exiled (Numbers 26:11)
- It is written in the singular tense "My soul"; For if it was written by the children of Korah, they would say 'Our souls'



# Introduction

- According to St. Augustine, 'sons of Korah' are the Christians, God's children
- He comments on this and says, "Now Korah may have been, as indeed he was, a certain definite person; and have had sons, who might be called 'the sons of Korah;' let us however search for the secret of which this is the sacrament, that this name may bring to light the mystery with which it is meaningful. For there is some great mystery in the matter that the name 'sons of Korah' is given to Christians. Why 'sons of Korah'? They are 'sons of the bridegroom, sons of Christ,' Why then does 'Korah' stand for Christ? Because 'Korah' is equivalent to 'Calvaria.'"



# Introduction

- He continues and says, “Therefore, the ‘sons of the bridegroom,’ the sons of His Passion, the sons redeemed by His Blood, the sons of His Cross, who bear on their forehead that which His enemies erected on Calvary, are called ‘the sons of Korah;’ to them is this Psalm sung as a Psalm for ‘understanding.’”
- Many think that Psalms 42 and 43 form one Psalm consisting of three equal stanzas, each ending with the same refrain, and they are similar in terms of style, in subject, and in tone
- But this may be due to the absence of any title to mark the beginning of Psalm 43



# Introduction

- According to some early fathers, this psalm is the voice of men of the old covenant who had strong thirst to encounter the Savior
- In their spiritual strife, they were like deer, running toward the water brooks, namely the fountains of prophecies, saying: *“Why are you cast down, O my soul?”* Hoping for the coming of the Lord, for He will surely come, to realize their salvation, and to fill them with joy and peace
- This Psalm is a lamentation of a soul of someone whose external circumstances are oppressing, verses 3,10, and the internal emotional condition is depressed and full of turmoil but with hope in God, verses 5,11



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5
- Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- The psalmist began this psalm with a powerful image – a *deer* aching with thirst
- The word *pants* is strong, and expresses that eagerness and fervency of desire, which is extreme thirst
- It denotes the cry of the hart, when in distress for water, and pants after it
- This thirst is either a natural thirst; or because of the heat of the summer season; and especially when deers are hunted by predators, they go to rivers of water, partly to make their escape, and partly to quench their thirst, and refresh themselves

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- The deer *longed for* and *needed* water and in the same way, the psalmist's *soul longed for* and *needed* God
- The thirsting deer is the symbol of the praying person who tends with his whole being, body and soul, towards the Lord, who seems distant and yet very much needed
- It is a soul in desperation that pants after God
- It is the thirsty, panting, weary soul, that in recognizing their spiritual lack, is overwhelmed with a deep craving for God's streams of living water

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- One may go many days without food, but *thirsts* shows an even more urgent need
- What makes this so beautiful is that he is not thirsting mainly for relief from his threatening circumstances
- He is not thirsting mainly for escape from his enemies or for their destruction
- He did not thirst after vain, useless idols, but after the only true and living God, *who was his life, and the length of his days,* Deuteronomy 30:20

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- David felt his separation from the tabernacle and its services as a sort of detachment and separation from God Himself
- *for the living God*, This title of God occurs only in one other Psalm (Psalm 84:2); but it was a title familiar to David (1 Samuel 17:27)
- It is first used in Deuteronomy 5:26; and, later, in Joshua 3:10; 2 Kings 19:4,16; Isaiah 37:4,17; Jeremiah 10:10,23:36; Daniel 6:26; Hosea 1:10
- It expresses that essential attribute of God that He is "*the eternal Life*" (1 John 5:20)

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- *appear before God*, Not merely in the temple, but for fellowship with God Himself
- Origen explained that the human search for God is a never-ending venture because progress is ever possible and necessary
- In one of his homilies on the *Book of Numbers* he writes: “Those who make their journey on the road to seek God’s wisdom do not build permanent homes but mobile tents, for they are in constant movement covering new ground, and the further they go, the more the road that lies ahead of them opens up, presenting a horizon lost in immensity”
- The psalmist is discouraged to the point of crying day and night

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- These tears can perhaps demonstrate the grief that made the psalmist long for relief in God
- And they showed the psalmist's grief over the perceived distance from God
- David's grief at being separated from God's presence is intensified by the reproaches of his enemies, "*Where is your God?*"
- Making the problem worse was being in the company of those who wanted to discourage him
- They wanted to make him feel that at his moment of need, God was nowhere to be found

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- The remembering of happier times made the psalmist sorrowful and desolate
- He thought of the times of joyful worship at the *house of God* and felt so distant from those good days
- *The house of God* With its liturgy, is that temple of Jerusalem; it is also the center of intimacy with God, *the fountain of living waters* as Jeremiah sings (Jeremiah 2:13)
- The joyful prayer of past times, raised to the Lord during worship in the temple, is now replaced by weeping, lament and supplication, *I pour out my soul within me*

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- Some people have a habit of remembering only the bad things
- But here the psalmist is showing us that memory can be an important aid by remembering the positive experiences of God's blessing
- According to St. John Chrysostom, the remembrance of God's past dealing with us, is a support for us in the present time
- He says, "Not remembering God as we should, and not bearing Him in our minds continually, cause things to appear more difficult; ... for He will surely say to us: 'As you have forgotten Me, I shall likewise forget you'.... How great is God's remembrance of us, and our remembrance of Him."



# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- In all of this, he is fighting for hope
- That remembrance of what things used to be – as well as the fact that his God is *the living God* – these realities fuel David to express confidence in the Lord and to praise him in verse 5
- He is not surrendering to the emotions of discouragement
- The psalmist challenged these feelings of spiritual depression and discouragement and brought them before God
- He said to those *cast down* and *disquieted* feelings, “*Hope in God*”
- He will come through again, because He has before
- There were some valid reasons for discouragement; yet there were many more reasons for hope

# Deep Distress and Longing for God 42:1-5



- Distance from home and the house of God; the mocking of unbelievers; memories of better days; still, these are not good enough reasons to be *cast down* when he thinks of the greatness of God and the *help* of His presence
- In his discouragement, the psalmist spoke to himself
- He did not feel filled with praise at the moment
- Yet he was confident that as he did what he could to direct his *hope in God*, that praise would come forth, *for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance*
- David understood that the answers were not within himself, but in the living God; he did not look within; he looked up

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- It is common tendency in such difficult times is to *stay away* from God
- But the psalmist described his *cast down* soul to God
- His own feelings overwhelm him, and therefore he must turn to God whose goodness he can call to mind
- He describes the place from which he speaks as *the land of Jordan* and the *Hermon*, where the Jordan rises from the roots of Hermon
- This explains why he was so far from the house of God and could not appear at the tabernacle or temple

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- Mount *Mizar* is a smaller mountain near to Hermon
- He is overcome with grief, while he is forced to hide himself in this wilderness beyond Jordan, and wander up and down on these solitary mountains, far distant from the tabernacle
- So, in order for him to revive his weary spirit; he will remember God from the land of Jordan
- He will consider God's infinite mercy, and power, and faithfulness, and His gracious presence in the sanctuary, from whence He hears and answers all those that call upon Him

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- St. Augustine comments and says, “If you would also ask the meanings of the names, Jordan means ‘their descent.’ Descend then, that thou mayest be ‘lifted up:’ be not lifted up, lest thou be cast down. ‘And the little hill of Hermon.’ Hermon means ‘anathematizing.’ Anathematize thyself, by being displeased with thyself; for if thou art pleased with thyself, God will be displeased with thee. Because then God gives us all good things, because He Himself is good, not because we are worthy of it; because He is merciful, not because we have in anything deserved it; it is from ‘the land of Jordan, and from Hermon,’ that I remember thee. And because he so remembers with humility, he shall earn his exaltation to fruition, for he is not ‘exalted’ in himself, who ‘glories in the Lord.’”

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- *Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls*, By which are meant afflictions, comparable to the deep waters of the sea, for their multitude and overwhelming nature
- These came pouring down, one after another
- As soon as one affliction is over, another came, as in the case of Job
- The psalmist is overwhelmed with a flood of hardships
- According to St. Augustine, *Deep calls unto deep* is the wisdom or the understanding
- The metaphorical language is derived from the surrounding scenery

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- The floods and whirlpools of the Jordan suggest the waves of adversity which have gone over his head
- The roar of the *waterfalls* calling to one another from opposite sides of the valley is like the voice of one depth of waters calling another to come out and join in overwhelming him
- That was the condition of the people of the old, when God brought over them the Assyrians, then the Chaldeans, to chasten them
- And that was the condition of the prophet Jonah fleeing from the face of God; when he prayed, *“For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me”* (Jonah 2:3)

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- Despite all these present woes, God will at some time *command His loving-kindness* to make itself apparent
- In the midst of his discouragement, he affirms God's sovereign love for him
- At the end of verse 7, he says, *All Your waves and billows have gone over me* but he never stops believing in the absolute sovereignty of God over all his adversity
- The psalmist came to a place of greater confidence, secure in God's goodness to him in the *daytime* or at *night*
- In the more awful *night*, he would have the gracious comfort of *His song* to be *with* him



# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- *And in the night His song shall be with me*, Signifying that he strongly believed he should have occasion of singing praise to God in the night season, though he was now in such mournful circumstances
- He calls it *His song*; because the matter of it are His lovingkindness, and the blessings springing from it
- The Lord Himself is the subject of it and because He gives songs in the night, and puts them into the mouths of His people; Isaiah 12:2

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- The psalmist had the confidence to call God his *Rock* – his place of security, stability, and strength
- David regarded God as his *Rock* that he could pour out his soul before Him so honestly
- He appealed to God as his defense, his helper and his Savior
- The psalmist senses God sustaining him, but his battle is not over
- At the same time, he could honestly bring his feelings to God and ask, “*Why have You forgotten me?*”
- It feels as if God has forgotten him

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- According to St. Augustine, these words are the cry-out of the Lord Christ on the cross, saying: “O God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?”
- There is the constant *oppression of the enemy*
- The reproaches of his enemies were grievous and cutting to him, as if a sword pierced through the marrow in his bones gives intense pain
- Cruel mockeries cut deeper than the flesh, they reach the soul
- Their mock and sneer, “*Where is your God?*” continued from them
- Such was the evil of David’s enemies, they said it *all day long* repeated it to him, and that for a length of time

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- Their argument was, that if he was truly the friend of God, He would not leave him
- The fact of his being thus abandoned proved that he was not a friend of God
- As the *oppression of the enemy* continued, so the psalmist would continue to speak to himself and challenge his own sense of discouragement
- *Why are you cast down, O my soul?* The idea is that of being bowed down, made sad, deeply afflicted, as one forsaken
- The pleasant words of verse 5 are repeated as both important and helpful

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- The psalmist needed to keep *hope in God* and keep confidence that he *shall yet praise Him*
- He is not surrendering to the emotions of discouragement, but he is fighting back
- God is faithful, God is love, therefore there is room and reason for hope
- David is saying, “As God formerly was, so He is still, and ever will Be; and will assuredly show Himself to be *my God*, although, for a season, He may hide His face, or withdraw His help from me.”

# Tribulation, Confusion, and Hope 42:6-11



- As the physical health of people is seen in the face, so is the spiritual health of the believers which they have from the Lord
- When God, as the sun of righteousness, appears upon His people, He, by his gracious presence, makes their countenances cheerful, fills them with great joy and causes them to lift up their heads with a holy boldness and confidence, and without shame and fear
- David was growing in confidence, and was able bravely to reply to the question, *Where is your God?*

# Discussion



- Who are the “Sons of Korah”?
- What condition is the psalmist experiencing in verses 1-2? What do the dried up “streams” represent?
- Since the cause was not sin, what elements appear to have triggered the psalmist’s condition?
- What does the psalmist do to face this condition?



# Discussion

- Where is the psalmist (42:6) and how does his location affect his troubled situation?
- What are the psalmist's enemies doing that causes him to doubt God's care and protection? Are his doubts valid? Why or why not? Are these questions sinful or God-honoring? Explain your answer.
- How is God described throughout this Psalm? Why is that significant?





# Discussion

- How does the psalmist express his faith and trust in God even in the middle of his trying circumstances?
- How can this Psalm be an example and guide for you in your own prayers when you feel downcast and disturbed?