

2001

## Psalm 42: To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

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### Recommended Citation

Keller, Walter E., "Psalm 42: To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites." (2001). *Walter E. Keller's Devotional Studies of Psalms*. 43.

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## **Psalm 42**

**To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.**

(NRSV)

- <sup>1</sup> As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.
- <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?
- <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”
- <sup>4</sup> These things I remember,  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.
- <sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help <sup>6</sup> and my God.
- My soul is cast down within me;  
therefore I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,  
from Mount Mizar.
- <sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows  
have gone over me.
- <sup>8</sup> By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.
- <sup>9</sup> I say to God, my rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?”
- <sup>10</sup> As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”
- <sup>11</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

**Psalms 42 and 43** may once have been sung continuously as a single Psalm. You will notice that 42:5, (and the first 3 words of verse 6), and 42:11 and 43:5 are all identical, leading to the very plausible conjecture that Psalms 42 and 43 were at one time a single Psalm, consisting of three strophes, each strophe ending with the same refrain. We can find clues as to something of the original setting in which this Psalmist prays. In 42:4 he remembers the past which now seems so irrecoverable, when he laments:

**“These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.”**

In 42:6 he speaks from the land of Hermon and Mizar, which is north of Israel and outside its territory. There he is experiencing the cruel taunts of his enemies, when in 42:10 he complains:

**“As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”**

For that reason he knows himself to be among an ungodly people (43:1). So we here have a single Psalm of one who is suffering the pain of an exile. Exactly when this exile might have taken place we cannot say; but it seems to be a personal exile, not the Babylonian Exile of in 586 B.C.

Two themes then emerge from this Psalm. One is the intense thirst for the true and living God that the Psalmist suffers because he is in exile in a foreign land, where he longs once more for the presence of God. Christians can identify with such longings, because we too are resident aliens in this world, citizens of heaven who await the return of our Lord. The second grows out of the sense of being a resident alien in this world, namely, that it may seem that we have been forgotten by God. Christians too are sometimes brought to wonder whether their faith really works, because God seems so remote and unresponsive to our needs. Both of these senses are fed and exacerbated by the taunts of the host nation, “Your feeble God – where is he now?” But the refrain lifts his spirits:

**“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and by God.”**

**Prayer to accompany Psalm 42:**

Lord God, never-failing fountain of life, through the saving waters of baptism you called us from the depth of sin to the depths of mercy. Do not forget the trials of our exile, but from the wellspring of the Word satisfy our thirst for you, so that we may come rejoicing to your holy mountain, where you live and reign now and forever. Amen.

**Linger longer over verse 2a:**

**My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.**