

Fact Sheet for **“Why Are You Cast Down? Hope in God!”**  
**Psalms 42 & 43**

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At times life can get tough, very tough! Marriage relationships can sour. Grown children can go off the rails. Our job can go up in smoke. Our best-laid plans for tomorrow can get shredded. Finances can jump up and clobber us. Medical problems can lay us low. The depression that can hit us during these times can be deep and overwhelming. These are the times for the Psalms, with their language of emotion. Though the situations they depict may be very different than ours, we can often identify with their words of distress and encouragement. And we can find ourselves strengthened in our spirits to a greater faith in God who can give us strength to face what tomorrow will bring.

Psalms 42 and 43 can be sung by themselves, but they really are two parts of a single poem, one of the most sadly beautiful in the Psalms. Some Hebrew manuscripts even combine them as one psalm. It is the lament of a temple singer who has been exiled in the north, near the headwaters of the Jordan, who longs to be back at God's house.

**ESV Psalm 42:1 *To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.***

A Maskil is a wisdom-song put to music. It is meant to be contemplated. The Sons of Korah were members of a Levitical choir appointed by King David to serve as Temple singers (1 Chronicles 6:31-32). Their ancestor Korah did not fare so well. He rebelled against Moses and was swallowed up by the earth (Numbers 16).

**Read the 1<sup>st</sup> Lament (42:1-4)**

We get our chorus from verses 1 & 2. The emotion of these two verses is not happy and light, like we often can sing it. It is an expression of the psalmist's strong desire for God, and the help only he can give. With the deer panting for water the psalmist has in mind the slow agony of drought (compare Joel 1:20). With this imagery the psalmist wrote of his long spiritual ordeal. He had been separated from the Temple in Jerusalem, and his ministry there.

Have you ever been able to identify with the first half of verse 3? His enemies were taunting him for his faith. This will be repeated in verse 10.

In verse 4 he was pouring out his soul to God in prayer. He was remembering the time when he formerly ministered at the Temple in Jerusalem. Then the psalmist then breaks into an inward looking refrain that he will repeat two more times.

**Read the 1<sup>st</sup> Hope (42:5-6a)**

This refrain will be repeated twice more. You almost get the sense here that the Psalmist is speaking words of encouragement to himself. Sometimes in our darkest hour we need encouragement like this!

### **Read the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lament (42:6b-7)**

The Jordan begins its journey to the Dead Sea far above the Sea of Galilee, at a place called Caesarea Philippi. It flows out of the rocks that are on the foothills of Mt. Hermon. We don't know where Mount Mizar is, but it is a peak in those same foothills. Mizar means "small" or "modest".

"The deep" in verse 7 calls to mind the formidable opening words of Genesis 1:2. The waters of the Jordan roared among boulders and over waterfalls. The psalmist felt overwhelmed by his distress as if he were in waters that were drowning him. His footing is gone. Wave after wave submerged him. Jonah used similar imagery (Jonah 2:3).

### **Read the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hope (42:8)**

But the psalmist's faith was in God, even while he questioned what God was doing

### **Read the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lament (42:9-10)**

These two verses are very similar to some of Job's thoughts.

### **Read the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hope (42:11)**

Now is the 2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence of the psalmist's refrain. Again, you almost get the impression that the psalmist is speaking words of encouragement to himself.

### **Read the 4<sup>th</sup> Lament (43:1-4)**

43:1 is a much more resilient opening than the opening of Psalm 42, with its picture of dryness and bewilderment.

Whether these verses speak of the psalmist's physical return to the Temple in Jerusalem, or whether these verses mean that even in exile the psalmist can enjoy God's blessing, is uncertain.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Hope (43:5)**

And now we have the refrain a 3<sup>rd</sup> time.

**<sup>5</sup> Why 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.**

For this 3<sup>rd</sup> time that the psalmist wrote this refrain you get a different sense than in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> times. Here it is almost a statement of his confident trust in God.

Life can get tough, very tough. But these tough times are often occasions when God can strengthen our faith in him. Turn your eyes on God in the midst of your distress. He will strengthen you!

Why are you cast down? Hope in God!