



# God's Presence

*God's presence brings peace and comfort even in times of adversity.*

## PSALM 42:1-11

There are people today who think mature Christians never struggle with feelings of discouragement. But this is not the case. Nearly one third of the psalms are laments, cries to God from people who were discouraged and seeking God's help. These psalms communicate that God understands our feelings of despair. He is ready to comfort and help those who seek and trust Him in times of adversity.

- How would you counsel a friend who is struggling with discouragement? Where have you turned for comfort in your times of adversity?

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**


## **PSALM 42-43**

Most scholars believe Psalms 42-43 originally were one composition, and that, perhaps for liturgical reasons, they were separated into two separate psalms later. Indications they originally were one psalm are as follows: (1) Psalm 43 has no heading to separate it from Psalm 42; (2) many Hebrew manuscripts combine Psalms 42-43 into one psalm; (3) both share similar phrasing; and (4) the two psalms share the same refrain at the end of each of the three poetic divisions (42:5,11; 43:5).

The heading of these psalms indicate they are a “maskil,” a psalm of instruction meant to enlighten those who hear or read it. The “sons of Korah” were worship leaders in the temple. That said, the writer and specific occasion of Psalms 42-43 is unknown. Together they are the lament of one who was a great distance from the house of God and the people of God. He longed to be back with them as he contended with the taunts of his enemies. His prayer was for God to vindicate him and return him to the temple.

Psalm 42-43 contains three sections, each concluding with a statement emphasizing the main point of the psalm: “Why my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.” In the first section (42:1-5), the psalmist expressed his longing to be with the people of God, worshiping the Lord in His temple. In the second section (42:6-11), he acknowledged his depression that was compounded by the added oppression of his enemies. But he also recognized that God was with him, even if he did not understand why he was suffering. In the third section (43:1-5), the psalmist realized he would get his answer when he was able to return to the temple.

At the end of each section, the psalmist’s self-rebuke is a reminder to himself that he must put his hope in God. He knew he could praise God in the midst of his difficulties because God is faithful to those who trust in Him.

 **As you read Psalm 42, highlight any repeated words and phrases. What does the repetition of these words and phrases reveal about the pain the psalmist was experiencing?**

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# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **IN TIMES OF LONGING** (PS. 42:1-5)

<sup>1</sup> As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God. <sup>2</sup> I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God? <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long people say to me, “Where is your God?” <sup>4</sup> I remember this as I pour out my heart: how I walked with many, leading the festive procession to the house of God, with joyful and thankful shouts. <sup>5</sup> Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.

### **VERSE 1**

Many prints have been produced depicting a peaceful scene of a deer drinking from a fresh stream of water with this verse printed underneath it. As beautiful as these prints may be, they fail to capture the context of Psalm 42. The picture the psalmist painted as he began this psalm is not one of serenity but one of scarcity, upheaval, and desperation. It depicts a prolonged drought. The prophets Jeremiah and Joel described the suffering of both people and animals alike who experienced the hard, barren fields and dried up riverbeds that encompassed the landscape during these droughts in ancient Israel (Jer. 14:1-6; Joel 1:20).

The expression ***longs for*** means “to have consuming desire for.” The psalmist was expressing his desperate yearning for God. As a deer cannot survive physically without water, so his soul could not survive spiritually apart from God. Speaking of the Spirit, Jesus promised that the one who believes in Him “will have streams of living water flow deeply within him” (John 7:37-39).

### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. The Holy Spirit’s presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. (See John 7:37-39; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

- What do you desire more than anything else? If your consuming desire is for something other than God, how would your life change if you desired Him more than you desired anything else?
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## VERSE 2

Because his spiritual vitality was weakening, the psalmist thirsted for **the living God** to renew and strengthen him. The false gods of his enemies were powerless to answer his cries (Ps. 135:15-18; Isa. 46:7). But the psalmist had no doubt his *living God* was able to meet his greatest needs and answer his prayer. The expression **appear before God** is an Old Testament way of referring to going to the Lord's sanctuary or temple to worship (Ex. 33:17; 34:24). This was the psalmist's desire. He knew he would be fully satisfied and spiritually reinvigorated when he could return and worship Him at His temple, the place of God's manifest presence among His covenant people.

## VERSE 3

During this time of isolation from the temple of God and the people of God, the psalmist's enemies continually taunted him. They asked, **Where is your God?** This question may be understood in at least one of three ways. First, his enemies may have been communicating that the psalmist's God did not exist. But this is unlikely. People in the ancient Near East tended to believe there were a multitude of gods that existed and that everyone worshiped a god, even if they didn't all worship the same gods.

Second, they could have been communicating that the psalmist's God was too weak to help him. People of that time and place evaluated the strength of a god by the physical strength and prosperity of its worshipers. Given the apparent despondency of the psalmist, this makes sense. There are other times the enemies of God's people ridiculed the Lord by saying He was too weak to defend His people (see Isa. 36:16-20).

However, the third meaning makes the most sense given the context (see vv. 9-10). It is most likely that these enemies were saying the psalmist had been abandoned by his God. This would have been a stinging statement for the psalmist in the midst of his feelings of isolation. There was a time when David felt like God had done this to

him (Ps. 22:1-2), and Jesus actually experienced it when He was forsaken by His Father on the cross (Matt. 27:46). However, Jesus suffered His Father's abandonment on the cross so that believers never will (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:38-39; Heb. 13:5).

When tempted to feel like we have been abandoned by God, we must remember His comforting words to us through Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, and the flame will not burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior" (Isa. 43:1b-3a).

### ***We need to be intentional about what we choose to remember and think about.***

#### **VERSE 4**

The psalmist was heartbroken as he reminisced the times he had led the procession of the people of God to the house of God with joy and thanksgiving. At the same time, these memories were an encouragement to the psalmist. They reminded him he was not alone in his faith in God. This is an important lesson for every believer. The psalmist demonstrated that we need to be intentional about what we choose to remember and think about (see Phil. 4:8). Reflecting on God's goodness in the past helps us find encouragement in the present and have hope for the future.

We often fail to fully appreciate blessings in life until we no longer are able to experience them. There are multitudes of believers today who terribly miss being able to attend church because they are physically incapable of doing so. For our own spiritual health and for the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is essential for us to be active members of a local church. Building relationships with other believers is one way of receiving encouragement in our walk with God (Heb. 10:25). We were created in Christ Jesus for fellowship with Him and with one another. It was wise for the psalmist to long to be with the people of God during this dark time in his life. Each of us needs help from others at one time or another.

VERSE 5

The psalmist revealed his self-talk. He rebuked himself for his sense of despair. Then he followed his rebuke with an exhortation, *put your hope in God*, together with a declaration, *I will still praise him, my Savior and my God*. To hope in God is to wait expectantly for Him, anticipating Him to act. When the psalmist looked to God, he saw the One who would save him. This gave him cause to continue praising God. Here the psalmist provided another example of how we should confront feelings of despair. We need to speak the truth to ourselves, and, like the psalmist, we repeatedly need to do so until it takes root within us (v. 11; 43:5).

- The psalmist talked to himself in verse 5. In light of this verse, what do you need to be saying to yourself?

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IN OVERWHELMING TIMES (PS. 42:6-8)

<sup>6</sup> I am deeply depressed; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. <sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your billows have swept over me. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will send his faithful love by day; his song will be with me in the night—a prayer to the God of my life.

VERSE 6

The psalmist recognized his deep depression. Nevertheless, he was determined to continue to *remember* God—who God is and what He had done in the past. Instead of being in Jerusalem at the temple, the psalmist was in another region. The *land of Jordan* could refer to anywhere along the Jordan River from the northernmost part of Israel to the south as the river empties into the Dead Sea. Given the mention of *the peaks of •Hermon*, the psalmist would have been in the north near where the Jordan River begins. It is unclear which mountain was *Mount •Mizar*, but it was probably part of the same mountain range as Mount Hermon. This means the psalmist was about 100 miles away from Jerusalem and the temple. Although he was not where he would like to have been, he set his focus on the Lord from where he was.

## VERSE 7

The headwaters of the Jordan River contain rushing water and waterfalls crashing down from the slopes of Mount Hermon. The psalmist used this picture to describe his precarious state. He was feeling the sense of helplessness and panic people experience when it appears that rushing water is about to sweep them to a watery grave. Metaphorically speaking, the psalmist was barely able to keep his head above water as the waves of despair incessantly crashed against him. One setback followed another, and he was physically, emotionally, and spiritually overwhelmed. It was as if he was literally drowning in his despair.

## VERSE 8

Nevertheless, the psalmist recognized God's faithful love for him at all times. He determined to sing a song of ***prayer to the God of my life*** in his darkest hour. Believers will do well to remember an oft-stated saying: "Don't forget in the darkness what God has shown you to be true in the light." Whenever believers have feelings of alienation and despair, they need to be reminded of truth—God sends His ***faithful love by day*** to protect and to provide. What's more, ***his song will be with them in the night*** as He expresses His delight in them (Zeph. 3:17).



To what Bible truths can you cling when you feel overwhelmed?

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## IN SEASONS OF WAITING (PS. 42:9-11)

**<sup>9</sup> I will say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about in sorrow because of the enemy's oppression?" <sup>10</sup> My adversaries taunt me, as if crushing my bones, while all day long they say to me, "Where is your God?" <sup>11</sup> Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.**


## VERSES 9-10

The psalmist exhibited strong faith in God while at the same time experiencing intense sorrow. By calling God ***my rock***, he believed God was trustworthy, that God would protect him and strengthen him in this ordeal. Still, he wrestled with his feelings as he expressed them to God through rhetorical questions. He felt as if God had forgotten

and abandoned him by not responding to his prayers, especially as the painful oppression of his enemies intensified. His enemies asked him, **“Where is your God?”** Their question said out loud what the psalmist was wondering himself.

**VERSE 11**

The psalmist knew the answer to their question, and he answered it by speaking truth to himself. God was with him; God had not abandoned him. Although in that moment he could not see it, the psalmist knew deliverance would come. Therefore, there was no good reason to feel **so dejected** and be **in such turmoil**. Instead, he could put his **hope in God** and **still praise him** because his **God** was his **Savior**.

 **What is this psalm telling you to do when you are in the midst of a hard season?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Compare two similar Bible passages.*

Most Bible scholars believe Psalms 42–43 originally were one composition. Compare the two psalms. What are the similarities? What words and phrases are repeated in both? How does Psalm 43 enrich the insights offered in Psalm 42?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can seek God’s comfort in times of need.
- + Believers can take comfort in God’s love for them.
- + Believers can know that God’s timing is always perfect.

 **Identify someone who is going through a time of adversity.**  
**How can your Bible study group minister to that person?**

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 **How does Psalm 42 prompt you to pray? Write your prayer here:**

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 **Memorize Psalm 42:1.**

## *Prayer Needs*

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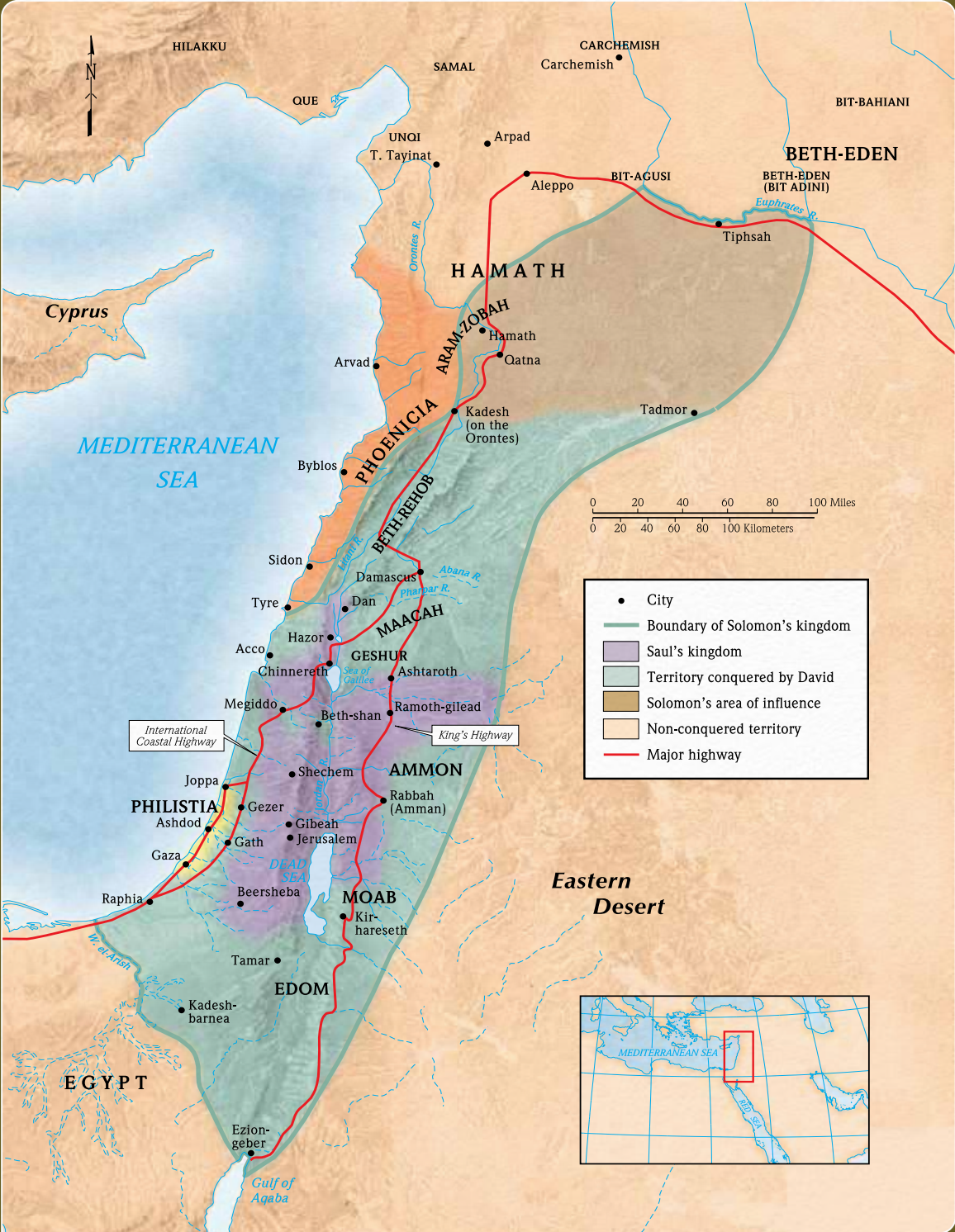
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# Kingdom of David and Solomon



"Kingdom of David and Solomon" is taken from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), p. 106. Used with permission.

## PSALMS

It's been said that music is the universal language of humanity. Something about songs just brings people together and challenges us to look deeper. For Christ followers, music is a vital part of our faith journey. It draws us closer to God and challenges us to become more like Him. That's why so many are captivated by the book of Psalms. This timeless songbook touches every aspect of our lives, offering wisdom, comfort, encouragement, and healing. As you study this sampling of the Psalms, let the ancient words meet you where you are. Listen as God speaks to your heart and reminds you just how much He cares about you.

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