

THE LONGING OF A PANTING HART

[Psalm 42:1-2](#) “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”

Is there anyone with a soul so dead that he has never experienced an intense longing and yearning at some time or another? Almost every traveler feels a quickening of the pulse as he is nearing home after a long journey. Do you remember that little child who would not be consoled until the mother had been found? Certainly you recall the time when you were separated, for a while, from your spouse and family.

Animals are also created with desires and longings. David, perhaps, saw a stag racing past him with its tongue extended, gasping and panting for breath. He immediately saw a comparison between the fleeing deer and his own pathetic plight.

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1. TO FIND REFUGE FROM THE CHASE

Every hunter and woodsman will recognize the picture before us; “As the hart panteth after the water brooks.” The deer has many enemies which pursue it; wolves, lions, dogs, and humans. Its very existence depends upon an alert attitude at all times, and the chief means of escape are its speedy legs. After a long hard chase the deer nears exhaustion and longs for a place of refuge or a shady spot in which to recuperate.



The date when this Psalm was written is probably the year of David's flight into the Trans-Jordanic territory when Absalom, his own son, stirred up a revolt against him. We can picture David fleeing from his enemies, perhaps sitting on some hill and looking longingly toward Jerusalem. Our Psalm is so beautiful and simple. David felt forsaken and alone and we are deeply touched by the tragic longing of the author, whose words strike a responsive chord in the heart of every child of God. He expresses a great thirst for the living God.

Have we never sighed with weariness in the struggle of life, nor become exhausted from the constant battle with the devil, the world, and our flesh? Do we not often feel forsaken and alone? Do not our crosses and afflictions bear down upon us causing us to cry out with the words of the well-known hymn "Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on Thee"? Refuge alone will not suffice, the hart must have water!!

2. TO FIND RELIEF FROM THIRST

The hunted becomes the hunter. At last, when the enemies have been outrun, with tongue out and the body liquids low, the hart has only one desire; cool, life-giving water. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks." Off the beaten track, weary and tired, the hart will instinctively look and long for the one thing needful, the refreshing water brooks.

It is possible that David was cut off from the services in the tabernacle when he wrote this Psalm. He sorely missed the singing and the reading of God's holy Word. The Prophet knew that God was omnipresent, but he felt His gracious presence to be closer and nearer to him in the house of worship. An overwhelming desire came over him and his soul began to thirst for the gracious presence of the living God. "Lead me beside the still waters of Thy Word," were his thoughts and desires at this time. David loved the Word of God and he expressed his attitude toward it in [Psalm 122](#), "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." The real cause of David's thirst he expresses in verse four of this Psalm where he wistfully reminds himself of a happier past, [Psalm 42:4](#) "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude. I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."

Do we have the same longing for the house of God? Or do we come to church out of a sense of duty, or because it is expected of us, or for the sake of our parents and relatives? If we were cut off from church services for a long time, would we begin to long for the house of God and say, "My soul thirsteth for the living God"?

In the gospel lesson we find the boy Jesus in the temple, much to the surprise of his parents. He too had an intense longing for God's house and a thirst for the preaching of His Word.

Whosoever rejects Christ and the Father will find himself with the eternal thirst of the rich man in hell, who begged for a drop of water to cool his tongue. The thirst of the damned will never be relieved.

Our sympathy and pity goes out to the panting hart, and we hope he found the water brooks and with them, renewed life. David found relief from his pathetic plight and, after the rebellion was over, he could again go to the house of God with the multitudes and hear of the coming Messiah who would redeem the world from sin and death.

Surely we can say with the Psalmist, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." We have assembled again before God in His holy temple, where we find our Savior with us as He was among the disciples so long ago.



Jesus alone is the "Water of Life" who extends this invitation to all men ([John 7:37](#)): "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." He alone can satisfy this great thirst for God, He only can bring us into the eternal presence of the living God, where we shall "neither thirst anymore.... for the Lamb shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." May we never lose our thirst for the Word of God, for our blessed Savior, and for the living God. May we always be able to say, "My soul panteth after thee, O God." AMEN.

PRAYER. Lord Jesus, Thou art the fountain of life, Thou art the Water of eternal life. We have come to Thy house of worship and our thirst has been satisfied. In Thy Father's house we always find Thee and are happy. It

matters not how hot the way nor how tiring the struggle of life may be, Thou wilt always refresh us with a cooling drink of Thy life-giving water. Pour out Thy Spirit into our hearts that we may never fall from Thee and Thy Word. Finally, let us be with Thee in everlasting glory where we shall drink of the eternal water brooks and be satisfied forever. Hear us for Thy name's sake. AMEN.