

Panting After God

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God” (Psa. 42:1).

According to The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, the “hart” of Bible times was “similar to the American elk but somewhat smaller.” A few other facts are mentioned: “Harts are stags or male deer whereas hinds are female deer. A single hart may weigh as much as three hundred pounds. Their six-prong antlers are shed annually. The habitat of the hart differs from that of the gazelle as the former must have more water.”

From the Old Testament Scriptures we learn that the hart moved from pasture to pasture for food (see Lam. 1:6). Also, as is true with deer, the hart intrigued its human observers with its unusual leaping ability (see Isa. 35:6). The animal’s need for water, however, is the primary message emphasized in our text. The deer-like creature must have accessible and adequate supplies of water.

The Psalmist used the hart’s longings for water to illustrate his own deep yearnings for God. We read in the Bible that “there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). There are no natural inclinations in the natural man toward God. The longings of the Psalmist’s soul, therefore, (and any longings in you and me, as well), testify of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life. Several streams of truth issue out of these water brooks.

As a deer knows that water alone will satisfy its thirst, so we must understand that God alone satisfies the yearnings He arouses within us! When being chased by dogs or alarmed by the gunshots of hunters, a weary deer makes its way to a stream of water from which it finds renewed strength. Similarly, believers often become weary in their journey, but, thank God, the satisfaction and strength we need is in our God Himself.

As a deer goes to water to escape the dogs on its trail, so we must recognize that God alone can deliver us from our enemies! Sometimes, when attempting to evade its agitators, the deer enters a stream, goes some distance with the current, then gets out on the other side. While the dogs are going up and down the bank trying to decide which way to go, the deer smiles as it escapes again. Likewise, the individual who runs to God finds safety and furtherance.

As a deer finds in water a means to stop its bleeding wound, so we must be aware that God alone can heal the wounds of life! Not only does cool water clot the flowing blood, but it refreshes the deer’s pain-ridden body. There is hope if it can get to the water. With the Psalmist, who likened his seeking soul to a panting deer, may we pant after God for true satisfaction of soul, deliverance from our enemies, and spiritual and inner healing.