

# Bite Size Bible Study

## Sons of Korah #143

By Pastor Lee

When you read Psalms 42, have you ever wondered about the first line?

For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

<sup>1</sup> *As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.*

<sup>2</sup> *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?*

If you don't skip that first line, several questions should come to mind: Who is Korah, and who are his sons, and what is a *maskil*? For a very short line it poses a lot of questions. Many other Psalms have a similar first line.

### Who is Korah?

*The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she bore to Esau:*

*Jeush, Jalam and Korah.* Genesis 36:14

Korah was angry that God limited the priesthood to Aaron's sons, and he led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16). God's judgment came against Korah and the earth swallowed him,

<sup>1</sup> *Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites—Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—became insolent<sup>2</sup> and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.<sup>3</sup> They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"*

<sup>28</sup> *Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea:<sup>29</sup> If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me.<sup>30</sup> But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."* Full story in Numbers 16

### Who are the Sons of Korah?

King David formed three choirs to serve in song at the house of the Lord. Each was led by a descendent of one of Levi's three sons: Kohath, Gershon, and Merari (1 Chronicles 6:16-48). Kohath's grandsons included Moses, Aaron, and Korah. Korah's three sons apparently didn't rebel, (Numbers 26:11). From these "sons of Korah" came the choir of that name that led Israelites to worship God in his way. Heman led the Kohath choir. Eleven psalms have the heading, "Sons of Korah": (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). Asaph was over the Gershon choir. Twelve psalms are ascribed to him: (50, 73-83). Jeduthun (Ethan) a the Merari choir. Juduthun is also mentioned in the inscriptions of three of David's psalms: (39, 62, 77).

These psalms are thought to be instructions for the community about how to face exile. The Korahite psalms offer a fitting introduction about hope and continued service born of loss, in response to the those who would cruelly taunt "Where is your God now?"

The Sons of Korah (Num 25:11, 58) continued down through the generations to be singers (2 Chr 20:18-20, 1 Chr 6:33-37), guardians "in charge of the work of the service" in the Temple (1Chr 9:19), as gatekeepers (1Chr 9:19, 23; 26:1), and Temple bakers 1Chr 9:31).

While not being Aaronic priests as Korah had believed that they should be, they never the less provided a much needed service to the Temple worship.

### What does Maskil mean?

The Hebrew word מַשְׁכִּיל (*maskil*) appears in many of the psalms in Book 2, where it is often translated as "a psalm."

The term מַשְׁכִּיל (*maskil*) most likely comes from the verb שָׁכַל (*skl*), which means "to have insight" or "to be skillful."

The one writing the *maskil* is said to be a wise servant, prudent and successful in his work. His *maskilim* (many *maskils*) are treated as part of the liturgy and are portions of wisdom to be followed.

**The depth that one can plumb the Scriptures can seem like plumbing an abyss.  
The only limit to God's teachings is our ability to dig a little deeper into the meaning of a scripture.**

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