

Psalm 102

A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed,
and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.

Psalm 102:

Though the author of this psalm is anonymous, he speaks for the afflicted of all ages who must rely totally on God for relief.

The answer to the psalmist's grief is not, in this case, direct divine intervention to alter his situation; rather, the psalmist's own reflection on the unchanging nature of God in His dealing with men soothes his troubled mind.

After his introductory petition (verses 1-2), the psalmist voices his lament (verses 3-11).

His relief comes when he begins (verse 12), dramatically with the words "but thou, O LORD", then expounds on the immutability and compassion of the LORD (verses 12-22).

Finally, the remaining section heightens the contrast between frail man and unchanging God by bringing both themes together (verses 23-28).

These statements about God's unchanging nature can just as easily be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer's refuge today, as the author of the Book of Hebrews applies them (see Hebrews 1:10-12).

Verses 1-28:

The non-specific superscription is unique to this psalm which highlights the thoughts of one who is afflicted (compare Psalms 22:69; 79; 102; 130; 142), perhaps expressing exilic lament (compare Psalms 42; 43; 74; 79; 137).

Like Job, whose troubles were not the result of God's judgment for personal sin, the psalmist cries out in pain.

His only relief comes from refocusing on sovereign God and His eternal purposes.

Messianic overtones are present (as Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes Psalm 102:25-26).

- I. A Pleas for Immediate Divine Help (102:1-11).
- II. A Perspective of God's Sovereignty and Eternality (102:12-22).
- III. A Prayer for Longer Life (102:23-28).

Verses 1-11:

The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but here, is often elsewhere, the Holy Ghost has put words into our mouths.

Here is a prayer put into the hands of the afflicted; let them present it to God.

Even good men may be almost overwhelmed with afflictions.

It is our duty and interest to pray; and it is comfort to an afflicted spirit to unburden itself, by a humble representation of its griefs.

We must say, Blessed be the name of the LORD, who both gives and takes away.

The psalmist looked upon himself as a dying man; My days are like a shadow.

Verses 1-2:

Frequently the Psalms begin with a cry for God's sovereign intervention when human resources have proved insufficient (e.g. Psalms 77:1; 142:1).

Psalm 102:1 "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee."

The prayer of a poor, destitute, and afflicted one.

His own, and not another's.

Not what was composed for him, but composed by him.

Which came out of his own heart, and out of unfeigned lips, and expressed under a feeling sense of his own wants and troubles.

And though dictated and inwrought in his heart by the Spirit of God.

Yet, being put up by him in faith and fervency, it is called his own, and which he desires might be heard.

"And let my cry come unto thee":

He calls his prayer my cry, because it was uttered in distress, and with great vehemence and importunity both.

And he prays that it might come unto God, even into his ears, and be regarded by him, and not shut out.

Prayer comes correctly to God, when it comes through Christ, and out of his hands, perfumed with the incense of his mediation.

The penman is not certain in this chapter of Psalms.

This could have been penned any time when great troubles came upon Jerusalem and its people.

It was possibly about the time of the captivity.

LORD here, is Jehovah.

It is such a shame that most prayers do not occur until there is great affliction.

Certainly when we are faced with great trials and tribulations in our life, we then turn to the LORD in sincere prayer to get us out of the problems we are facing at the moment.

The penman here is not only praying earnestly, but also begging the LORD to listen and answer this prayer.

Psalm 102:2 "Hide not thy face from me in the day [when] I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day [when] I call answer me speedily."

"Thy face ... thine ear":

Anthropomorphic language (i.e., a figure of speech that attributes human features to God), which points to God's attention and response respectively.

This is so much like what happened with the Hebrew children that were on their way to the Promised Land.

They would sin, and God would allow terrible suffering to come.

Then they would repent and ask God for His help.

God would forgive them and restore them, and then they would drift into sin again.

This has been the story of man from the foundation of the world.

Not only does the penman here want an answer to his prayer, but he wants a speedy answer.

Verses 3-5:

"Bones ... heart ... bones":

These terms describe the emotional and physical toll of the psalmist's ordeal.

Psalm 102:3 "For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a hearth."

Which suddenly rises up, is easily dissipated, and quickly disappears.

So sudden, short, and transient, are the days of man's life (see James 4:14).

Or "in smoke", as the Syriac version.

His days were spent in great obscurity, in the darkness of affliction, temptation, and desertion.

And in so much vexation, trouble, and uneasiness, as if he had lived in smoke all his time.

And; "My bones are burnt as a hearth":

On which fire is continually made for the preparation of food, and other uses.

Or as a "trivet", or "gridiron": so the Targum: or as a frying pan; so the Arabic version.

The meaning is, that, through trouble and grief, his bones, the strongest parts of his body, the props and supports of it, were so weakened and enfeebled, the strength of them so exhausted, that they were as if they had been parched and burnt up, as the hearth by fire (see Prov. 17:22).

He is in such heavy grief, that it seems his days are like a puff of smoke.

They are here, and then they are suddenly gone.

This bitter grief that he is feeling is making him sick in his body. He says, even his bones are aching from the grief.

Psalm 102:4 "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread."

Like grass in the summer solstice, which being smitten with the heat of the sun, or by some blast of thunder and lightning, is dried up, and withers away.

So his heart was smitten with a sense of sin, and of God's wrath and displeasure at him, and with the heat of affliction and trouble.

That it failed him, and he could not look up with joy and comfort.

"So that I forget to eat my bread":

Sometimes, through grief and trouble, persons refuse to eat bread.

As Jonathan and Ahab, which is a voluntary act, and purposely done.

But here, in the psalmist, there was such a loss of appetite, through sorrow, that he forgot his stated meals, having no manner of inclination to food.

Some understand this of spiritual food, the bread of life, refusing to be comforted with it.

So the Targum, "for I forgot the law of my doctrine."

This is speaking of a broken heart that feels as if it has withered and died like the grass does when it is cut.

This person has no desire to prolong the agony and desires no food to eat.

This is a fast from food, not unto the LORD, but just no desire to eat.

Sometimes this happens with grief experienced at the loss of a loved one.

Psalm 102:5 "By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin."

Under the burden of sin, and pressure of afflictions.

"My bones cleave to my skin":

Was quite emaciated, reduced to a skeleton.

Became nothing but skin and bone; which sometimes is occasioned, as by outward afflictions, so by soul troubles.

Or "to my flesh"; flesh is put for skin (see Job 19:20).

If a person ceases to eat, the fat on the body is burned up and they become very thin.

This would be the case here, where the bone is up next to the skin.

A common way to say this would be (they are skin and bones).

Psalm 102:6 "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert."

"Pelican":

Possibly a desert owl.

The verse describes a desolate situation, extreme loneliness (Isaiah 34:8-15; Zephaniah 2:13-15).

"Owl":

Owls were unclean animals (compare Lev. 11:16-18).

A pelican in the wilderness would symbolize the destitute condition of this penman.

A pelican feeds off fish in the water, and would be the next thing to dead, if they were living in the wilderness.

An owl is a very ominous bird.

They are creatures of the night.

Their hooting is so mournful that it reminds you of a death call.

The owl usually is thought of as dwelling in a desolate place.

The psalmist is saying, he feels as if he has been deserted.

Psalm 102:7 "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top."

"Sparrow alone":

Just feeling like a solitary bird, the psalmist expresses his perceived abandonment by both God and man.

It is as if he feels that he is the only one who cares whether there is a homeland at all or not.

The lonely sparrow on the housetop is watching and waiting for an opportunity to build a nest.

The psalmist is saying, he too is watching and waiting for the opportunity to build a home again in his land.

Psalm 102:8 "Mine enemies reproach me all the day; [and] they that are mad against me are sworn against me."

For his principles and practices, being different from theirs.

For his religion, and the preciseness in it; for his faith and profession of it, and for his holy walk and conversation.

Good men have their enemies, and always had.

But then they are such who are also enemies to God and Christ, and true religion.

And these, not content to reproach now and then, continually throw out their scoffs and jeers.

Which is not grateful, and is here mentioned as an article of complaint.

Though the saints should reckon reproach for the sake of Christ and religion greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt.

"And they that are mad against me":

As the Jews were against Christ, because of his miracles, doctrine, and success, and therefore sought to take away his life.

And as the Apostle Paul before conversion was, even exceeding mad against the saints, and persecuted them to strange cities (Luke 6:11).

And so were the psalmist's enemies quite outrageous and implacable, being his sworn enemies, as it follows.

"Are sworn against me":

Laid themselves under a curse, to do him all the mischief they could, and it may be to take away his life.

As those who swore they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12).

Or they swore to lies, false charges and accusations brought against him, like those that Jezebel suborned against Naboth.

Or "they swore by me"; as the words may be rendered.

They swore by his calamities and distresses, and wished they might be as he was, if they did not do so and so; and took his name for a curse.

Those enemies that have taken away his way of life seems are not content to just have won, they are taunting him asking him, where his God is now?

It seems these evil enemies of this man have even sworn to destroy him completely.

Again, he has not left his native land, but is waiting for the opportunity to live there.

His enemies are telling him day and night, that will never be.

Psalm 102:9 "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,"

He sitting in ashes, as Job did, and rolling himself in them in the manner of mourners; and, having no other table than the ground to eat his food upon, he might eat ashes along with it.

And by an exchange of the words, the sense may be, that he ate bread like ashes, no more savored and relished it, or was nourished by it, than if he had eaten ashes.

The meaning is, that he was fed with the bread of adversity, and water of affliction.

"And mingled my drink with weeping":

That is, with tears; as he drank.

The tears ran down his cheeks, and mixed with the liquid in his cup.

He was fed with the bread of tears, and had them to drink in great measure.

These were his meat and his drink, day and night, while enemies reproached him, swore at him, against him, and by him (see Psalm 80:5).

It was a very high form of grief to wear sackcloth and pour ashes upon their head.

This is what he has been doing here.

In fact, he has done this so much that the ashes have gotten in to the little food he does eat.

He has wept so much, that his tears are in the water he drinks.

Verses 10-11:

A lengthened shadow":

The time of sunset is used to describe the psalmist's desperate sense that his life will end shortly because God has punished him by withdrawing His presence and strength.

Psalm 102:10 "Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down."

Because I do not only conflict with men, but with the Almighty God, and with his anger.

"For thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down":

As a man lifts up a person or thing as high as he can, that he may cast it down to the ground with greater force.

Or he aggravates his present reproach and misery by the consideration of that great honor and happiness to which God had formerly advanced him, as Job did (Job 29-30; and the church, Lamentations 1:7).

This does not have to be some king or ruler to pen this.

All Hebrews had been God's chosen people, and in a way, had been elevated up above others around them.

He may have been cast down of God, but if God did cast him down unless he deserved it.

God's wrath is reserved for the children of disobedience.

Ephesians 5:6 "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Psalm 102:11 "My days [are] like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass."

Or, "that is stretched out", which, though it may appear long, is soon at an end.

As it does appear longer when the sun sets, and departs from the earth.

He reckons his life not by months and years, but by days.

And these he compares to a "shadow", which has no substance in it.

His age being as nothing before the LORD, and has much darkness and obscurity in it.

His days being days of darkness, affliction, and trouble, and quickly gone, as man's life is.

There is no abiding (see 1 Chron. 29:15).

"And I am withered like grass":

Which in the morning is flourishing, is cut down at noon, and withered at evening.

This is the case of all flesh, however beautiful and goodly it may look.

It is weak, frail, and mortal and cannot stand before the force of afflictions, which quickly consume strength and beauty, and much less before the scythe of death (see Psalm 90:5).

This is actually the fate of all men who are not in right standing with God.

Everyone, good and bad, begin to die the day they are born.

The only important difference in one man over another, is what happens to them after this brief life here on the earth.

Those who trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, inherit eternal life.

Verses 12-22: We are dying creatures, but God is an everlasting God, the protector of his church; we may be confident that it will not be neglected.

When we consider our own vileness, our darkness and deadness, and the manifold defects in our prayers, we have cause to fear that they will not be received in heaven.

But we are here assured of the contrary, for we have an Advocate with the Father, and are under grace, not under the law.

Redemption is the subject of praise in the Christian church.

And that great work is described by the temporal deliverance and restoration of Israel.

Look down upon us, Lord Jesus; and bring us into the glorious liberty of thy children, that we may bless and praise thy name.

The psalmist radically shifts his focus from earth to heaven, from his dilemma to God, and basks in the eternal nature of God and the eternal outworking of God's redemptive plan.

Psalm 102:12 "But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations."

This address is made to Christ, as is clear from (Psalm 102:25; compared with Heb. 1:10).

Who is a divine Person, endures forever, is from everlasting to everlasting.

Unchangeably the same in his love, power, wisdom, faithfulness, etc., and though he died as man, he will die no more.

He is alive, and lives for evermore; and because he lives, his people shall live also.

And he will come again to take them to himself.

And, as Mediator, he is King forever.

Always continues, as such, to rule over, protect, and defend his people.

And is a Priest forever, and ever lives to make intercession for them.

And his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, have a constant virtue in them, to take away sin, and secure from it.

The consideration of the perpetuity of Christ, in his person and offices, was a comfort to the psalmist under his troubles, and in a view of his own declining state.

The Targum is, "but thou, O LORD, thy habitation continues for ever in heaven:"

"And thy remembrance to all generations":

The remembrance of his name Jehovah, or Jesus, or Immanuel, or any other, is sweet and precious to his saints in all ages.

And so the remembrance of his works, of what he has done and suffered, especially the great work of redemption.

For the remembrance of which the ordinance of the Lord's supper is appointed to be continued till his second coming.

And his Gospel is an everlasting one, which will transmit the memory of him to men in every age, to the end of the world.

And though all flesh is as grass, and every man dies, even the ministers of the word, yet that itself lives forever.

Aben Ezra reads "thy throne", as agreeing with (Lam. 5:19).

The psalmist here, is going to the source of help. He is saying, even though my time on the earth is very short, You are from everlasting to everlasting.

The psalmist is aware that he will soon be forgotten when his life on this earth is done, but God will never be forgotten.

Every generation has its opportunity to accept or reject the salvation offered through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All know of God, in every generation.

Their choice is to believe unto eternal life, or not believe and wind up in hell.

Verses 13-16:

Earthly Zion or Jerusalem is in view (compare verses 16, 21-22).

Perhaps this points to the time of restoration after the Babylonian Exile (ca. 605 – 536 B.C.).

Psalm 102:13 "Thou shalt arise, [and] have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come."

Exert his power, and display the riches of his grace and mercy.

Not by delivering the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, to which some restrain it; but by redeeming his church and people by power and price.

Or rather by raising up and restoring them to great glory and prosperity in the latter day.

"For the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come":

Not the seventy years of the captivity made known to the prophet Jeremiah; rather the seventy weeks of Daniel fixed for the Messiah's coming.

Or the fullness of time agreed upon, between Christ and his Father, for him to come and redeem his people.

But it may best of all design the end of the forty-two months, or the 1260 days, or years, fixed for the treading underfoot the holy city.

For the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth, and for the reign of antichrist; which when come will usher in glorious times in favor of Zion, the church of God (Rev. 11:2).

We have spoken of Zion, and all that it means in all of these lessons.

Zion, the mountain in Jerusalem, certainly will be totally restored as the holy city of God.

Some would say that this very thing has already happened when the Jews got control of Jerusalem again.

Looking at the standpoint of the church, we would say that it has not yet been restored to the greatness that it once had.

There may still be a falling away, before we get desperate enough to ask God to intervene and restore its greatness.

There is a time when even this will happen.

I believe the time is very near.

Our cry should be for mercy, and not justice.

Psalm 102:14 "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof."

Meaning not Cyrus and Darius, who gave leave and orders for the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem, as some.

Nor Nehemiah, and Ezra, and others, who took more pleasure in the stones and rubbish of the temple, as it lay in ruins, than in all the stately palaces in Babylon.

And who were very desirous of, and took delight in gathering these stones, and putting them together again, as others.

But, the ministers of the Gospel, and other Christians, in the latter day, who will take pleasure in the great number of converts that there will then be, who, as lively stones, will be built up a spiritual house.

And especially when those stones shall be laid with fair colors, and the headstone shall be brought in with acclamations, crying, Grace, grace unto it (see 1 Peter 2:5).

"And favor the dust thereof":

Which sometimes designs multitudes (Num. 23:10).

Perhaps here it may denote the meanest of the Lord's people, who will be regarded, and not despised by his servants.

But they will show favor to them, do them all the good they can, and wish well to them, and pray for their prosperity.

And for the peace of Zion; that God would make it the joy of the whole earth.

And when there shall be such a delight in the stones and dust of Zion, and a spirit of grace and supplication poured forth upon the servants of the LORD.

To pray for the promised glory and happiness of it.

It will be a token for good, and an intimation that the set time to favor her is at hand.

Which seems to be the sense of the psalmist: such great reverence and respect have the greatest of the wise men among the Jews for the land of Israel, literally understood.

That they kiss the borders, the stones of it, and roll themselves in its dust, having perhaps in mind this passage of Scripture.

Just the wailing wall remains of the old temple in Jerusalem.

It is strange, in view of this scripture that the wall is large stones.

The Jewish people, and many Christians from around the world, go to that wall of stones and pray today.

Psalm 102 Questions

1. Who wrote the 102nd Psalm?
2. What type of prayer does verse 1 say this is?
3. What type of answer does the penman want to his prayer?
4. For my days are consumed as _____.
5. What does (my bones are burned as a hearth), mean?
6. His heart is withered like _____.
7. What is he saying (my bones cleave unto my skin)?
8. What does a pelican in the wilderness symbolize?
9. What type of bird is the owl?
10. What does he mean by comparing himself to a sparrow upon the housetop?
11. What are his enemies doing to him all day long?
12. How serious are their threats?
13. What does his statement (I have eaten ashes like bread), mean?
14. What caused his drink to be mingled with weeping?
15. Whose wrath is he speaking of in verse 10?
16. God had lifted him up and _____.
17. When do you begin to die?
18. What is the difference in godly men and worldly men?
19. The remembrance of God is unto all _____.
20. Zion will be restored to be the _____ of God.
21. The cry of the Christian should be for _____, not _____.
22. Where does the author believe the stones spoken of in verse 14 are?