

PSALMS

Chapter 102

Do Not Hide Your Face from Me

A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you! 2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call! 3 For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. 4 My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread. 5 Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh. 6 I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; 7 I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. 8 All the day my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse. 9 For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink, 10 because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down. 11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. 12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations. 13 You will arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come. 14 For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust. 15 Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. 16 For the LORD builds up Zion; he appears in his glory; 17 he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. 18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD: 19 that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, 20 to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, 21 that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, 22 when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD. 23 He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. 24 “O my God,” I say, “take me not away in the midst of my days—you whose years endure throughout all generations!” 25 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 26 They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, 27 but you are the same, and your years have no end. 28 The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.

Ps 102 The prayer of an individual in a time of great distress. It is also one of the traditional penitential psalms (see introduction to Ps 6). Some interpreters believe that the “I” of vv. 1–11, 23–24 was originally communal (see note on Ps 30 title; see also note on title below). (See introduction to Ps 101.) The main body of the psalm (vv. 1–22) is developed in four stanzas (initial appeal for God to hear, vv. 1–2; description of distress, vv. 3–11; assurance that the Lord will surely hear, vv. 12–17; call for the Lord’s certain deliverance to be recorded for his enduring praise, vv. 18–22), followed by a concluding recapitulation (vv. 23–28). (CSB)

Writer of this penitential psalm (cf Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 130; 143) is not identified, but his condition is *faint*. Weariness that envelops heart, body, and soul. He is near despair. Much has gone wrong in his personal life, including the humiliation of his nation (vv 14, 17, 20). The lament still confesses a deep faith in the Lord’s care and the security that comes from God’s creative and eternal strength. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, cry for help; vv 3–11, the individual’s miserable state; vv 12–17, the psalmist calls God to hear the cries of the destitute; vv 18–22, praises for the Savior; vv 23–28, confession of God’s eternal nature. (TLSB)

The biblical story that best fits the circumstances of this psalm is the prolonging of Hezekiah’s life for fifteen years after God had told him that his life was about to end. In Isaiah 38 there is a psalm which Hezekiah wrote in response to that situation. It is very similar to Psalm 102. (PBC)

102 title Unique in the Psalter (no author named and no liturgical or historical notes), the title identifies only the life situation in which the prayer is to be used, and in accordance with vv. 1–11, 23–24 it designates the prayer as that of an individual. But vv. 12–22, 28 clearly indicate national involvement in the calamity. It may be that the distress suffered by the individual, while its description suggests physical illness, is the result of his sharing in a national disaster such as the exile—a suggestion supported by references to the restoration of Zion. Because of the close relationship of the fortunes of king and nation and because of the many themes shared by this and some of the royal psalms, it has been plausibly suggested that the prayer was originally that of a Davidic king, or of a member of the Davidic royal house, while in Babylonian exile. (CSB)

102:1–2 Initial appeal for God to hear. (CSB)

102:2 *hide your face*. God seems absent from His people (cf 13:1). (TLSB)

How like us when trouble strikes! Prayer and worship, long delayed, come pouring out when we must face the reality of sin’s consequences. (LL)

Asking to be heard is not an outgrowth of expecting not to be heard but rather an effective way of recalling that is ready to hear. (Leupold)

incline your ear – The fact that he quotes more or less from other psalms shows how very useful the knowledge of good devotional helps may be in a day when it is doubly difficult to pray original prayers. (Leupold)

102:3–11 The description of distress—a suffering so great that it withers body and spirit—brought on by a visitation of God’s wrath (v. 10) and making him the mockery of his enemies (v. 8). (CSB)

Section captures the agony of anyone in deep distress. (TLSB)

102:3 *my days*. His life wastes away—a lament that frames the whole stanza (see v. 11). (CSB)

bones burn. As if a fire is consuming his physical frame (see 31:10; 32:3; 42:10). (CSB)

Perhaps a high fever or the heat of arthritis. (TLSB)

102:4 *heart*. Here “heart” is used in combination with “bones” (v. 3) to refer to the whole man (body and spirit); see 22:14; Pr 14:30; 15:30; Isa 66:14 (“and you” represents the Hebrew for “and your bones”); Jer 20:9; 23:9. (CSB)

Not just the emotions involved, but the whole person. Every fiber of one’s being is affected—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. (TLSB)

102:5 *my loud groaning* – Like a typical Oriental, the writer did not hesitate to give vent to his feeling. (Leupold)

bones cling to my flesh – This condition seems to mean that strength has so completely left him that the bones cannot drag the rest of the body along. (Leupold)

He is emaciated; similar to the saying “nothing but skin and bones.” (TLSB)

102:6 *owl ... owl*. Translations of two different Hebrew words (cf. Lev 11:16–18). The owl was associated with desert areas and ruins (see Isa 34:11, 15; Jer 50:39; Zep 2:14). (CSB)

Though the exact species are unknown, they are separated from the rest of the flock, an allusion to someone wasting away in loneliness, unable even to sleep. (TLSB)

He is as lonely as an owl in the desert or a solitary bird on a rooftop. (PBC)

102:7 *I lie awake* – When insomnia is added to a long list of the other afflictions it becomes very burdensome. (Leupold)

102:8 *use my name for a curse*. They say, “May you become like that one (the one named) is.” (CSB)

His condition is so horrendous that others can simply use his name as a way to wish the same misery on someone else. (TLSB)

102:9 *ashes ... tears*. Both typically accompany humiliation and mourning (Is 61:3; Ps 42:3). (TLSB)

He has lost his appetite so that his food tastes like ashes. (PBC)

People in affliction often sat on an ash heap. It seemed to him that the very ashes became mingled with his food while his tears dropped into the cup from which he drank. (Leupold)

For tears as food and drink see 42:3; 80:5. (CSB)

102:10 *indignation and anger*. God is angered by what man has done. There is an admission of sinfulness and guilt at this point. (Leupold)

thrown me down. Despair deepens in that now he claims that he suffers because God’s anger has thrown him away as something worthless. (TLSB)

102:11 A concluding summation of vv. 3–4. (CSB)

102:12–17 Assurance that the King eternal will surely hear the prayer of the destitute (v. 17) and restore Zion (see note on 3:8). (CSB)

His mood changes drastically as hope replaces despair. God hears his prayer. (TLSB)

102:12 *enthroned forever*. A central theme of the preceding collection (Ps 92–100). Because God reigns forever and remains the same (see v. 27), his mercies to those who look to him for salvation will not fail. (CSB)

Many preceding psalms (Ps 93; 95–99) declare “The LORD reigns.” The basis of hope is God remembering His people with both almighty power and loving pity. (TLSB)

remembered. For elaborate celebrations of the Lord’s renown see Ps 111; 135; 145. (CSB)

102:13 This verse and v. 16 form an inner frame around the stanza. The two verses (see v. 14) suggest that the psalmist’s distress was occasioned by the Babylonian exile. (CSB)

appointed time. The time set by God for judgment and deliverance (see 75:2; Ex 9:5; 2Sa 24:15; Da 11:27, 35). Perhaps the psalmist is referring to a time announced by a prophet. (CSB)

102:14 *dear...servants*. If Zion, the city of God (see 46:4; 48:1–2, 8; 87:3; 101:8; 132:13), is so loved by the Lord’s servants (see Ps 126; 137), how much more is she cherished by the Lord! (CSB)

stones ... dust. Broad description of Israel’s national crisis, not just the individual’s suffering. Though once great Jerusalem (“Zion”) has been reduced to rubble, the psalmist is confident that the Lord will reveal His glory by restoring the nation, bringing fear to other nations, and listening to the destitute. God brings Israel out of exile, and Jerusalem is rebuilt. But the greater answer to this prayer is the new Jerusalem awaiting God’s people at the end of time, because Jesus has restored hope (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22). (TLSB)

102:16 *Lord builds up Zion* – The sudden concern for Zion suggests that the psalm was written at a time when Jerusalem and its people were in danger. This also corresponds well with the time of Hezekiah when the threat of capture by the Assyrians was hanging over Jerusalem. (PBC)

appears in his glory. Or “and thus appear in his glory” see also Isa 40:1–5). This hope will find its fullest expression in the “new Jerusalem” (see Rev 21). (CSB)

102:18–22 Let God’s certain deliverance of his people be recorded for his continual praise. (CSB)

102:18 *recorded*. Only here does a psalmist call for memory to be sustained by a written record of God’s saving act; usually oral transmission suffices (see 22:30; 44:1; 78:1–4). (CSB)

Future generations can read what God will do as if it had already happened. (TLSB)

created. Brought into being by God’s sovereign act (see 51:10; 104:30; 139:13). (CSB)

102:19 *holy height ... heaven*. Hbr poetic device to emphasize the thought. Both words picture God looking down to see those in desperate need. He enters their lives with love and favor. (TLSB)

102:20 *prisoners ... doomed to die*. Perhaps prisoners of war, but more likely the exiles in Babylon. (CSB)

Israelites in exile or perhaps any prisoners of war. (TLSB)

set free. Rv 21:3–4 pictures the ultimate freedom from tears, pain, and death that comes from Jesus stepping into human life and bringing His chosen nation (1Pt 2:9–10) into the heavenly Jerusalem. (TLSB)

102:21 *praise.* See note on 9:1. (CSB)

declare ... praise ... gather ... worship. In heaven, God’s people worship the Lord in endless praise. (TLSB)

102:23–28 Concluding recapitulation. (CSB)

102:23–24a The psalmist’s life is so intertwined with that of God’s people that hope for Zion has become his own hope. (LL)

102:23 *my.* The individual returns to his misery. (TLSB)

midcourse. Prime of life. Emphasis is still on the Lord, contrasting His permanence to the fleeting nature of all created life. (TLSB)

102:24b–27 Heb 1:10–12 uses these verses to show Jesus’ superiority to the angels. He is Creator of the heavens and earth (cf Jn 1:1–3). (TLSB)

It must be remembered that life itself was regarded as a great blessing from God, and a normal span of days was a grace bestowed by God. (Leupold)

102:26 *Like a garment.* With his first creation God clothed himself with the manifestation of his glory (see 8:1, 3–4; 19:1; 29:3–9; 104:1, 31; Isa 6:3; see also Job 38–41, especially 40:10). But he is more enduring than what he has made—and the first creation will give way to a new creation (see Isa 65:17; 66:22). (CSB)

Speaking figuratively, as a garment gradually wears thinner and thinner with use and must be ultimately be discarded and replaced by another, so the visible heavens and earth will also in due time wear out. (Leupold)

102:28 Because the Lord does not change (see v. 27), Israel’s future is secure (see Mal 3:6). (CSB)

live in your presence. Or “dwell in the (promised) land” (see 69:36; see also 37:3, 29; Isa 65:9). (CSB)

established before you. Because God is eternal, His people are assured that they, too, will be eternally safe (2Sm 7:24). (TLSB)

In Christ’s Easter victory lies our great hope. Because Jesus lives forever, all of us, all Zion’s children, have the hope of eternal life and the promise of a God who can help our children and their descendants. God will never abandon us, not even! (LL)

Ps 102 The tears, fever, lost appetite, despair, and doubt in this psalm are eerily identical to what we go through when a personal crisis erupts in our life or a disaster rips through our town or nation. Yet it is written with confident hope because attention is turned to the God who listens to the pleas of the destitute. When you lament, turn your attention to God's answer to these prayers: Jesus Christ. He stepped into our world and took on our groans and death, restoring confident hope at the appointed time on Easter morning. • Risen Lord, establish the new Jerusalem for us forever. Answer our prayers, in Your dear name. Alleluia! Amen. (TLSB)