

Psalm 102 NIV (Author Unknown)

“A Prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the lord”.

This afflicted one borrowed his tone and some of his phrasing from Job, who is the Old Testament’s greatest example of affliction. Many phrases also match others in the psalms.

This psalm describes Jerusalem (Zion) in a state of ruin. If this is taken as literal ruin, the psalm may have been written by those in exile who mourned over both their personal and national affliction. Adam Clarke followed this thinking and suggested the author could be Daniel, Jeremiah, or Nehemiah.

History of the Babylonian Captivity Exile

The Babylonian captivity or exile refers to the period in Israel’s history when Jews were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. It is an important period of biblical history because both the captivity/exile and the return and restoration of the Jewish nation were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies.

God used Babylon as His agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. With each successive rebellion against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar would lead his armies against Judah until they laid siege to Jerusalem for over a year, killing many people and destroying the Jewish temple, taking captive many thousands of Jews, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins.

As prophesied in Scripture, the Jewish people would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. That prophecy was fulfilled in 537 B.C., and the Jews were allowed by King Cyrus of Persia to return to Israel and begin rebuilding the city and temple. The return under the direction of Ezra led to a revival among the Jewish people and the rebuilding of the temple.

It was during this time that Nebuchadnezzar took many of the finest and brightest young men from each city in Judah captive, including Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego). The books of 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings deal with much of the time leading up to the falls of both the Northern Kingdom and Judah. They also cover the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah was one of the prophets during the time leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, and Ezekiel and Daniel were written while the Jews were in exile. Ezra deals with the return of the Jews as promised over 70 years before by God through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. The book of Nehemiah also covers the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile was over. This historical account demonstrates God’s faithfulness to His people, His judgment of sin, and the surety of His promises.

According to the title, the psalmist was afflicted and faint; burdened to present his complaint to the Lord. He was groaning in distress (verses 2,5) and weeping and groaning over the ruins of Jerusalem (verse 9). His opening prayer in verses 1-2 draws from several other psalms, giving us an example of what it means to pray the Word of the Lord. (See 18:16; 27:9; 31:2; 37:20). As believers face and deal with the painful crises that come to us, if we are to overcome and glorify God, we must keep three assurances before us.

- **The Changing Circumstances of Life (verses 1-11)**
- **The Unchanged Covenant of God (verses 12-22)**
- **The Changeless Character of God (verses 23-28)**

The Changing Circumstances of Life (verses 1-11) –

- The longer we live, the more evidence we see that *things will change*. John F. Kennedy stated, “Everything changes but change itself”.
- There are the normal changes of life, from birth to maturity to death.
- There are also providential changes that God sends for our good and His glory.

Many Jewish leaders in the days of Jeremiah the prophet thought that God would never allow Judah to be captured and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed (Jeremiah 7), but the Babylonian army did all three. They also took prisoners to Babylon and left only the poorest of the people to care for the land.

Whether we are suffering because of our sins, or because we stand up for the Lord, or simply because we need to be better equipped for service, these changes are not pleasant. The psalmist recorded his personal plight in a series of vivid pictures.

➤ **Verse 1** – “Hear my prayer, Lord; let my cry for help come to you”.

- The psalmist begs for God to hear his prayer.
- He calls his prayer *my* cry, because it was uttered in distress, and with great intensity.
- He is not only praying earnestly, but also begging the LORD to listen and answer this prayer.

➤ **Verse 2** – “Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly”.

- The affliction itself was bad enough, but it was made worse beyond measure by the sense that God did not see or care. When he had the sense that God’s favor and face were evident, the affliction could be endured.
- Not only does the penman here want an answer to his prayer, but he wants a speedy answer.

➤ **Verse 3** – “For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers”.

- He is in such heavy grief, that it seems his days are like a puff of smoke.
- This bitter grief that he is feeling is making him sick in his body. He says, even his bones are aching from the grief.

James 4:14 NIV “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes”.

James 4:14 MSG “You don’t know the first thing about tomorrow. You’re nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, “If the Master wills it and we’re still alive, we’ll do this or that.”

Proverbs 17:22 NIV “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones”.

➤ **Verse 4** – “My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food”.

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.

➤ **Verse 5** – “In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones”.

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.

Job 19:20 NIV “I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth”.

➤ **Verse 6** – “I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins”.

The desert owl is an 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.

➤ **Verse 7** – “I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof”.

- 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.

- **Verse 8** – “All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse”.
- Those enemies that have taken away his way of life are not content to just have won, they are taunting him asking him, where his God is now?
- 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 happen.
- **Verse 9** – “For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears.”

MSG – “They bring in meals—casseroles of ashes! I draw drink from a barrel of my tears.

- The meaning is, that he was fed with the bread of adversity, and water of affliction.
- 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 into the little food he does eat. He has wept so much, that his tears are in the water he drinks.

Job 2:8-10 The Message

7-8 Satan left God and struck Job with terrible sores. Job was ulcers and scabs from head to foot. They itched and oozed so badly that he took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, then went and sat on a trash heap, among the ashes.

9 His wife said, “Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!”

10 He told her, “You’re talking like an empty-headed fool. We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?”

Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God.

- **Verse 10** – “because of your great wrath, for you have taken me up and thrown me aside”.
- The mourning was so bitter because of the sense that this affliction came as some kind of punishment from God.
- 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.”

- ❖ **God's Wrath** - Both humans and God express wrath. But there is vast difference between the wrath of God and the wrath of man. God's wrath is holy and always justified; man's is never holy and rarely justified.
 - In the Old Testament, the wrath of God is a divine response to human sin and disobedience.
 - The wrath of God is consistently directed towards those who do not follow His will (Deuteronomy 1:26-46; Joshua 7:1; Psalm 2:1-6).
 - God's wrath against sin and disobedience is perfectly justified because His plan for mankind is holy and perfect, just as God Himself is holy and perfect. God provided a way to gain divine favor—repentance—which turns God's wrath away from the sinner. To reject that perfect plan is to reject God's love, mercy, grace, and favor and incur His righteous wrath.

Only those who have been covered by the blood of Christ, shed for us on the cross, can be assured that God's wrath will never fall on them. "Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!" (Romans 5:9).

- ❖ **Chastening** - The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word "chasten" as: "1: to correct by punishment or suffering: DISCIPLINE, also: PURIFY; 2a: to prune (something, such as a work or style of art) of excess, pretense, or falsity: REFINE; 2b: to cause to be more humble or restrained: SUBDUE." Chastening is for the purpose of discipline and purification.
 - This is God's way of disciplining us to make us more obedient to Him.
 - Many times, we are chastened because of our own sins.
 - Many times, discipline is for our own safety and wellbeing; God sees the areas of danger that we ourselves cannot see.

➤ **Verse 11** – "My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass".

Overwhelmed with a sense of divine rejection he felt that his life was short and had little meaning.

Psalm 90:5-6 New Living Translation

5 You sweep people away like dreams that disappear. They are like grass that springs up in the morning. **6** In the morning it blooms and flourishes, but by evening it is dry and withered. This is the fate of all men who are not in right standing with God. Everyone, good and bad, begins 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.

Summary of Verses 1-11

One of the first steps toward personal peace and victory is to accept the fact that there will be changes in life, and how we respond will determine what these changes do to us and for us. The psalmist responded by turning to the Lord for help.

The Unchanged Covenant of God (verses 12-22) –

- “But you, O Lord” marked a change in the psalmist’s outlook as he turned from himself and his problems to trust and acknowledge God’s unchanged covenant.
 - The throne of David was gone and would not be claimed until the Son of David came to earth (Luke 1:30-33), but the throne of God in heaven was secure.
 - Judah and Jerusalem were experiencing shame, but God’s “memorial name” of great renown would not change. One day the nations would respect that name (verse 15) and praise that name in a new Jerusalem (verse 21).
 - From generation to generation, His people had known and revered that name and the Lord had not failed them, but they failed the Lord. He had made a wonderful covenant with His people (Leviticus 25-26; Deuteronomy 28-30) and had not changed it. If His people obeyed His law, He would bless them, but if they disobeyed and turned to idols, He would chasten them. Either way, He would show His love and faithfulness.
- **Verse 12** – “But you, LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations”.
- 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.
 - Man may have days like shadows or wither away like grass, but Yahweh shall endure forever.
 - The psalmist can therefore reject all self-reliance and hold on to a true reliance upon God.

❖ But God...Moments

- “Once we were dead to any real love for God at all, buried under the compounding and disorienting blindness of our sins (Ephesians 2:1), but God.
- Once we were deceived by our own lust for glory and self-determination; once we were unknowingly led by the pied piper called “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), but God.
- Once we lived enslaved to the passions of our flesh, being driven, and tossed between the impulsive waves of our flesh and mind (Ephesians 2:3), but God.
- Once we were God’s enemies (Romans 5:10), hating him (Romans 1:30), children of his wrath. But God.

But God being rich in mercy, but God showing his incomprehensible “love for us in that while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8) he said to us God-dead, God-ignoring, God-rivaling, God-hating, dry-boned children of wrath: “live” (Ezekiel 37:5)! Live to true beauty, live to true glory, live to true hope, live to true pleasure, live to true joy! Live to God (Galatians 2:19) and live forever (John 6:58)!

- **Verse 13** – “You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come”.
- Though in deep affliction, the psalmist had steadfast confidence that God would act and show mercy to Jerusalem once again.
- At God’s appointed time, Jerusalem would be the object of God’s favor. He had a set time for their restoration and would not forever leave them in ruin.
- **Verse 14** – “For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity”.
- The psalmist was overwhelmed by a sense of his own ruin and need (Psalm 102:1-11). Yet he did not allow that to turn him completely inward; he also cared for his community.
- “When the people of God cease thinking about themselves so much and begin thinking about the state of things around them, particularly our cities and those who are suffering in them, then God may indeed hear our prayers and send a revival.” (Boice)
- **Verse 15** – “The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory”. The KJV states, “the Heathen shall fear the name of the Lord”.

God would so reveal Himself that all the kings of the earth would honor His name and glory. The kings and kingdoms of the world honor Yahweh because He reveals Himself in His work toward Zion.

Romans 14:11 King James Version

“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God”.

- **Verse 16** – “For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory”.

That is, when he will have drawn his church out of the darkness of death. His glorious power, wisdom, and goodness shall be manifested to all the world.

Isaiah 60:1-2 New Living Translation
(Future Glory for Jerusalem)

1 Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you.

2 Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you.

➤ **Verse 17** – “He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea”.

- “Only the poorest of the people were left to sigh and cry among the ruins of the beloved city; as for the rest, they were strangers in a strange land, and far away from the holy place, yet the prayers of the captives and the forlorn offscourings of the land would be heard of the Lord.” (Spurgeon)
- God heard the cries of the Israelites and He hears our prayers. Nehemiah wept, prayed, and fasted when he heard of the status of remnants of the Israelites and Jerusalem during the exile:

❖ **Nehemiah 1 (Cupbearer to the King)**

5 Then I said: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you.

7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees, and laws you gave your servant Moses.

8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,

9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.

11 Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

- **Verse 18** – “Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord:”
 - This will be written for the generation to come.
 - God’s goodness to Zion and the whole earth is a testimony for the future, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.
- **Verse 19** - “The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth,”
- **Verse 20** – “to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death.”
- **Verse 21** – “So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem.”
- **Verse 22** – “when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord.”

He looked down from the height of His sanctuary: The psalmist pictured God bending down low from heaven:

- To see (viewed the earth). Nothing on this earth is or can be hidden from God’s all-seeing eye.
- To hear (the groaning of the prisoner). He looks down, not to take a view of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, but to do acts of grace, to hear the groaning of the prisoners.
- To act (to release those condemned to death). God not only heard them, but wanted to help them, to loose those that were appointed to death. Some understand it of the release of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon. God heard their groaning there as he did when they were in Egypt (Exodus 3 7, 9) and came down to deliver them.
- To proclaim (the name of the LORD in Zion). That is, that the prisoners and persons appointed to death, being loosed, might declare, in the church, what great things the Lord has done for them; and so speak well of his wisdom, power, grace, and goodness, in their deliverance; profess His name, and confess Him before men, and express a value for His name, and show forth the honor of it, and seek His glory. Are we declaring the great things of our Great God?
- To gather (when the peoples are gathered). Jew, Gentile, kingdoms will come together as one, on that glorious day and worship the Lord.

Summary of verses 12-22 – When the Jewish exiles were released from captivity in Babylon and allowed to return to Judah, this was a witness to the surrounding nations that Jehovah was on the throne and guiding in the destiny of His people; this included the future generations as well. God’s covenant, God’s glory, and God’s people are all a part of the future of Jerusalem! God hears the prayers of His people; we will one day, all God’s people assemble and worship the Lord together.

The Changeless Character of God (verses 23-28) –

- The psalmist was afraid he would die in mid-life and never see the restoration of Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple.
- The eternal God would remain forever, but frail humans have a brief time on earth (90:1-12). He is God and He is the same from generation to generation (Hebrews 13:5-8).
- **Verse 23** – “In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days”.
- The psalmist began this song by recognizing his own weakness (Psalm 102:1-11).
- Then he praised God for His deliverance and ultimate victory (Psalm 102:12-22).
- Now in the last section of this psalm, he confessed once again his weakness and frailty (shortened my days).
- In addition, the psalmist recognized that it was God who either caused or allowed his weakness and frailty. Here the psalmist wrote with a point much like that of the much later Apostle Paul, who saw God’s plan and even glory in his present weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 The Message

7-10 Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn’t get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan’s angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn’t think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,

My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

- **Verse 24** - So I said: “Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.

The psalmist did not want his days to end mid-life or the halfway point of his life. He was overwhelmed by both his sense of great weakness in affliction, and by the awareness of God’s greatness and ultimate victory, the psalmist did the right thing. He cried out in prayer, pleading for God’s merciful help.

- **Verse 25** – “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands”.

God created the heavens and earth. ‘The earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof and the world and all they that dwell in it’ (Psalm 24:1).

Verse 26 – “They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded”.

- The contrast was clear to the psalmist. The mighty God is eternal (throughout all generations) and can do all things (You laid the foundation of the earth).
- The things God creates may perish, but He Himself will endure.
- God has complete power over creation, including the power to change the heavens as He pleases.

Verse 27 – “But you remain the same, and your years will never end”.

Yet He Himself is unchanging (You are the same) and eternal (Your years will have no end).

The passage of verses 25-27 are also stated in the New Testament, Hebrews 1:10-12:

Psalms 102:25-27	Hebrews 1:10-12
25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.	10 He also says, “In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded.	11 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.
27 But you remain the same, and your years will never end.	12 You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

Though there will be changes and chances of this mortal life, one topic of consolation will ever remain, the eternity and unchangeable God, our Savior, of Him who was, and is, and is to come.

- **Verse 28** – “The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.”
- The psalmist ended his prayer and this psalm with a note of confidence, even triumph.
- His affliction seems to have remained, and he does not proclaim hope for his present trouble. At the same time, he is utterly confident of God’s goodness and ultimate victory for His people (Your servants).
- If the psalmist did not see it in his own day, his children surely would, and their descendants will be established by God’s goodness and strength.

Summary – Progression of Psalm 102

- He began with an honest declaration of his own misery.
- Then he looked outside himself to his community.
- Then he looked outside his community to the world.
- Then he looked outside his time to future generations.

Final Thought – (Daily Bread August 10, 2023)

When God’s people were in captivity in Babylon, Isaiah reminded them that God had upheld them from birth and would continue to care for them. Through the prophet, God said, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you” (Isaiah 46.4).

God will not abandon us when we need Him the most. He can supply our needs and remind us He’s with us at every point in our lives. He is the God of all our days.

Sources:

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Desiring God – “But God”

Gotquestions.org/What does it mean to be chastened?

Gotquestions.org/What is the biblical understanding of the wrath of God?

Gotquestions.org/What was the Babylonian captivity/exile?