

## psalm 102

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## Psalm 102.<sup>1-5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
and let my cry come unto thee.  
<sup>2</sup>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.  
<sup>3</sup>For my days are consumed like smoke,  
and my bones are burned as an hearth.  
<sup>4</sup>My heart is smitten, and withered like grass;  
so that I forget to eat my bread.  
<sup>5</sup>By reason of the voice of my groaning  
my bones cleave to my skin.

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

This is the first of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. In the previous penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51), we have seen the Psalmist resort to many images and metaphors as he tries to help the Lord, and his reader understand how he feels about his sins and his seemingly incessant inclination to sin. In today's reading, the Psalmist resorts to such imagery once more.
  - ? Take a moment to identify the images that the Psalmist utilizes.
2. The Psalmist speaks of being "consumed like smoke," "burned as an hearth," and "withered like grass."
  - ? What do you see in your mind as you try to visualize each of these images?
  - ? How do these images make you feel?
3. The Psalmist complains that "my bones cleave to my skin."
  - ? What do you suppose he means by this?
  - ? What might it have to do with his "forgetting to eat my bread," i.e., fasting?
  - ? How does fasting impact our search for answers and solutions (here the Psalmist is looking for a "solution" to his sins in for form of forgiveness) whatever they may be?
  - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist request that Yahweh act "speedily"?
  - ? Does this seem appropriate to you?
  - ? When is it reasonable to expect God to respond quickly to our needs?

Psalm 102.<sup>6-11</sup>

<sup>6</sup>I am like a pelican of the wilderness:  
I am like an owl of the desert.  
<sup>7</sup>I watch, and am as a sparrow  
alone upon the house top.  
<sup>8</sup>Mine enemies reproach me all the day;  
and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.  
<sup>9</sup>For I have eaten ashes like bread,  
and mingled my drink with weeping,  
<sup>10</sup>Because of thine indignation and thy wrath:  
for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.  
<sup>11</sup>My days are like a shadow that declineth;  
and I am withered like grass.

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This is the second of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. As in previous penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51), and in the previous verses of 102, the Psalmist continues to resort to dramatic imagery in order to describe his feelings concerning his sins and his seemingly incessant inclination to sin. In today's reading, the Psalmist uses the following similes: He is

“like a pelican of the wilderness”  
“like an owl of the desert”  
“as a sparrow alone upon the house top”

- ? What do these similes have in common?
  - ? What feeling do they convey?
  - ? Have you ever felt alone and abandoned by God because of weakness and sin?
  - ? How can and does the Atonement help chase away such feelings?
2. Utilizing yet another simile, the Psalmist says that he is “like a shadow that declineth.”
  - ? What do you hear, see, and feel in this simile?
3. Finally, in describing the feelings brought on by his sins, the Psalmist speaks of having “eaten ashes like bread.”
  - ? What images and impressions come to mind when reading this?
  - ? How effective is this imagery in helping you understand and feel his plight?
  - ? How will today's reading impact your determination to trust God with your sin and repent?

Psalm 102.<sup>12-18</sup>

- <sup>12</sup>But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever;  
and thy remembrance unto all generations.
- <sup>13</sup>Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:  
for the time to favour her,  
yea, the set time, is come.
- <sup>14</sup>For thy servants take pleasure in her stones,  
and favour the dust thereof.
- <sup>15</sup>So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD,  
and all the kings of the earth thy glory.
- <sup>16</sup>When the LORD shall build up Zion,  
he shall appear in his glory.
- <sup>17</sup>He will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and not despise their prayer.
- <sup>18</sup>This shall be written for the generation to come:  
and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

Psalm 102 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

This is the third of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. In our previous readings from the penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102), we have heard language that expresses the Psalmist's deep sorry and uncertainty as the result of sin. We could say that the Psalmist is "destitute."
  - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's expressed hope that God "will regard the prayer of the destitute"?
  - ? How likely is it that "the destitute" has difficulty that God will see their plight, hear their cries for help, and be able to effect some type of positive outcome in their lives?
  - ? What sorts of things could you do when faced with someone who is feeling "destitute" for whatever reason?
  - ? What sorts of things would you want to avoid saying and doing so as not to add to an individual's "destitution"?
2. In this reading, the Psalmist speaks twice of "Zion."
  - ? Why, in a "penitential psalm" focused on repentance, do you think Zion came to the Psalmist's mind?
  - ? What is Zion, anyway?
  - ? What is the relationship between "Zion" and the repentance and forgiveness of sin?
3. This reading begins with the Psalmist's statement of contrast, "But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever."
  - ? Take a moment to look back at the previous verses. With what is the Psalmist contrasting Yahweh's endurance?
  - ? What is the significance of this contrast?

Psalm 102.<sup>17-21</sup>—Lent

- <sup>17</sup>He will regard the prayer of the destitute,  
and not despise their prayer.  
<sup>18</sup>This shall be written for the generation to come:  
and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.  
<sup>19</sup>For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
<sup>20</sup>To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death;  
<sup>21</sup>To declare the name of the LORD in Zion,  
and his praise in Jerusalem...

For our 34<sup>th</sup> reading during Lent 2024, we return to the Penitential Psalms. Psalm 102 is the fifth of the seven Penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

1. In each penitential psalm, we hear the Psalmist's expressions of deep sorrow and uncertainty as the result of sin. We could say that the Psalmist is "destitute."
  - ? How do you feel about the Psalmist's expressed confidence that God "will regard the prayer of the destitute"?
  - ? How likely is it that "the destitute," especially those whose destitution is a result of their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior, find it difficult to believe that in seeing their plight God will hear their cries for help, and be willing to come to their rescue?
  - ? What can you do when you are faced with similar doubts?
  - ? What can you do and say to help others when they feel such doubts?
  - ? What sorts of things would you want to avoid saying and doing so as not to add to an individual's "destitution"?
  - ? What other scripture passages come to mind as being those that teach this same thing about the character of God as a rescuer?
2. The central story of the Hebrew Bible is the story of God's deliverance of Israel from its Egyptian slavery. Consider the following words from today's reading:

"For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death..."

- ? How might these words apply to Israel's experience in Egypt?
- ? How might these words apply to our experience in sin?
- ? What would you think and how would you feel if we understood these verses to teach that God is constantly looking down upon the earth to see if there are any he can liberate—physically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.? He anxiously hunts for those to help?
- ? How do you feel about such a God?
- ? How would such a view of God impact the way you approach him to seek freedom from sin and the insecurities that sin brings with it?
- ? How do you feel about a God who, rather than being "put out" with you when you present your sin to him, is pleased to have the opportunity to liberate you from your acknowledged sins?

3. The Psalmist says that his testimony concerning Yahweh's gracious willingness to rescue is being "written for the generation to come" and to inspire "his praise in Jerusalem."
  - ? How do you feel about these objectives possessed by the Psalmist?
  - ? How closely do they mirror your own desires in bearing testimony of the goodness that God has brought into your own life, especially through his rescuing you from sin and its eternal consequences?

In Ephesians 1, Paul compiles quite a list of the blessings that come into our lives through Jesus and his Atonement. Paul reminds us that one of God's principal "purposes" in bestowing all these blessings was so that "we should be to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1.<sup>11-12</sup>).

- ? How does this relate to and enhance today's reading?
- ? What can you do during Lent and then over the Easter Season to act as one who causes others to "praise" God?

Psalms 102.<sup>19-25</sup>

- <sup>19</sup>For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
<sup>20</sup>To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death;  
<sup>21</sup>To declare the name of the LORD in Zion,  
and his praise in Jerusalem;  
<sup>22</sup>When the people are gathered together,  
and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.  
<sup>23</sup>He weakened my strength in the way;  
he shortened my days.  
<sup>24</sup>I said,  
“O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days:  
thy years are throughout all generations.  
<sup>25</sup>Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth:  
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.

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This is the last of four readings from Psalm 102.

1. While the Jewish Passover is clearly connected to the events surrounding Israel’s liberation from their centuries long bondage, Yom Kippur does not possess clear associations with that important and defining event—defining as to the character of God and the obligations of Israel to him. Yet, there may be associations to be made between Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the Day of Atonement, and our deliverance from sin. Consider the following words from today’s reading:

“For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary;  
from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;  
To hear the groaning of the prisoner;  
to loose those that are appointed to death...”

- ? How might these words apply to Israel’s experience in Egypt?
- ? How might these words apply to our experience in sin?
- ? What would you think and how would you feel if we understood these verses to teach that God is constantly looking down upon the earth to see if there are any he can liberate—physically, politically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.? He anxiously hunts for those to help?
- ? How do you feel about such a God?
- ? How would such a view of God impact your approaching him to seek freedom from sin and the insecurities that it brings with it?
- ? How do you feel about a God who, rather than being “put out” with you when you present your sin to him, is pleased to have the opportunity to liberate you from your acknowledged sins?