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## psychiatry in the Bible

### Psalm 102: A prayer of the afflicted

Seri Abraham

The Book of Psalms in the Bible is a compilation of 150 poems and songs. Psalm 102 is considered a 'prayer of the afflicted' and 'prayer of a young man with trouble'. The author of the psalm remains unknown.

The first half of Psalm 102 is of particular interest from a psychiatric point of view because of the similarities between the psalmist's description of his difficulties and depressive symptoms. The psalmist describes his mental state as 'being distressed' (verse 2) and his 'heart being blighted and withered like grass' (verse 4). The psalmist also refers to significant weight loss, 'reduced to skin and bones' (verse 5) due to 'forgetting to eat my food' (verse 4) and 'eating ashes for food' (verse 9). In verse 9 the psalmist refers to being tearful ('mingle my drink with tears') and in verse 7 he reveals having sleep difficulties ('I lie awake all night'). It also appears that the psalmist has turned to drink, perhaps to cope with his feelings. There is also mention of the psalmist isolating himself in verse 7 which says 'I have become like a bird alone on a roof'. 'My bones burn like glowing embers' in verse 3 could possibly be in reference to joint and muscle pains which point towards somatic symptoms associated with depression. The psalmist also voices negative cognitions about himself and others: 'my days vanish like smoke' (verse 3) and 'all day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse' (verse 8). The poetic description of the melancholy experienced by the psalmist therefore fits the description of a depressive episode.

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