

Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land



SABBATH—JANUARY 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 74:18–22; Psalm 88:3–12; Psalm 42:1–3; Psalm 77; Psalm 37:1, 8; Psalm 125:3.

The poets talk about how they feel when God is silent and doesn't answer their prayers for help right away.

MEMORY VERSE: “But we cannot sing songs about the Lord while we are in this foreign country!” (Psalm 137:4, ICB).

IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS, the poets understood that life on this earth is filled with sin, evil, suffering, and death. Satan and his followers always work to destroy this earth and attack God's holy laws. As sin and evil make life on earth worse, God's people often feel, at times, that living on this earth is the same as living in a “foreign country” or a strange land. The poets who wrote the Book of the Psalms often felt this way, too. They wondered, “How do we live a life of faith in a strange land?”

As we saw already, the poets in the Book of Psalms know that God is in control. They also believe that God protects His people in hard times. So, the poets are, at times, confused when they see evil winning. The poets wonder, Where is God? We wonder these things, too, at times. We must remember that the poems in the Book of Psalms are also prayers. In these prayers, the poets talk about how they feel when God is silent and doesn't answer their prayers for help right away. Maybe you felt that way, too, when you prayed. You may have wondered why God didn't answer your prayers right away. Or maybe you felt that God was far away. This week, we will look at some of the poems in the Book of Psalms that talk about what we should do during the times when God is silent.

THE DAYS OF EVIL (Psalm 74:18–22)

Read Psalm 74:18–22 and Psalm 79:5–13. These two poems are also prayers. What are these prayers about? What is the poet asking the Lord to do?

The poet wants to understand the war between good and evil. The poet says that God is patient, wise, and powerful during this war.

In the Book of Psalms, whenever the poets talk about evil, they also talk about how God will solve this problem. When God’s enemies destroy Jerusalem and the temple, the poets get upset. They worry that people from other countries will think God is weak and then insult Him. The people of Israel are God’s special treasure. God gave them His promise (Deuteronomy 4:32–38; Deuteronomy 32:8, 9). Israel is “living proof” that God will keep His promise. God’s promise to Israel during Bible times also is an end-time promise for us. We are also God’s special treasure. In the future, everyone will bow to the Lord. People from every age will serve Him. These promises are precious to the poets. That’s why they get upset when foreign armies force their way into Israel. These armies are a danger to everything God promised His people.

The poet knows that Israel’s sins hurt their relationship with God. The sins of their fathers brought curses on their land and their children (Psalm 79:8, 9). Only God can save His people now. The poet says the Lord is “our God and Savior” (Psalm 79:9, ERV). These names for the Lord show us that He will keep His promise (Psalm 79:9).

What is more important to the poets than God’s blessing Israel? Nothing is. In Psalm 79, the poet wants all people to honor and praise God (Psalm 79:9). The poet wants God to punish the countries who hurt Israel. If God punishes these people, they will know that God is powerful (Psalm 74:18–23; Psalm 83:16–18; Psalm 106:47). When God saves His people, His Name will be honored and praised.

Today, our sins also hurt us. Our sins also hurt God and cause other people to insult Him. How many people have rejected God because of the evil behavior of Christians?

“God’s honor and Jesus’ honor will be seen in the holy lives of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 671, adapted. What does this important spiritual truth mean to you? How should it change the way you live?



In Bible times, God promises to keep Israel safe and make them His special treasure. God also makes His end-time church this same promise today.

I AM READY TO DIE! (Psalm 88:3–12)

Read Psalm 41:1–4; Psalm 88:3–12; and Psalm 102:3–5, 11, 23, 24. What experiences do these poems talk about? Have you felt this way, too?

Psalm 41, Psalm 88, and Psalm 102 are prayers. The poets ask God to save them from sickness and death. These poems help us remember that God’s children often have difficult experiences in life. God’s children may suffer and get sick. The poets talk about their own suffering and pain. They have no strength. They dry up the same as grass. They feel as if they are about to die and lie down in the grave. Their friends stay away from them. One poet says, “Because of my sadness, I am losing so much weight that my skin hangs from my bones” (Psalm 102:5, ERV).

Many poets in the Book of Psalms believe that Israel suffers trouble because they refused to obey God. The poets understand that sin can cause people to get sick. So, they talk about the need to ask God for forgiveness so that God can heal them (Psalm 41:3, 4). Sometimes we didn’t do anything to cause our suffering. Psalm 88 and Psalm 102 talk about how God’s people suffer because we live on an earth filled with sin. So, suffering is part of life. This idea is hard for many people to accept and understand.

In Psalm 88, the poet complains that God is the cause of his suffering (Psalm 88:6–8). Do you see that the poet’s complaint is filled with faith? If the Lord allowed the poet to suffer trouble, He can also save His child from it.

When the poet feels that he is about to die, he remembers God’s love and care (Psalm 88:10–12). Yes, the poet believes that God punishes him. At the same time, the poet grabs hold of God and holds on tight. The poet knows that God loves him and is the only One who can save him. The poet knows about suffering, but he also knows about God’s mercy.

Psalm 88 shows us that God is in control. He controls whatever happens in life. God may allow suffering. He also may save His children out of it. His control over everything that happens to us should fill our hearts with hope.



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Think about Jesus on the cross and what He suffered because of sin. God the Father suffered with Jesus, in the Person of Jesus. They suffered worse than any of us. How can this idea help us keep faith in times of suffering?

WHERE IS GOD? (Psalm 42:1–3)

Read Psalm 42:1–3; Psalm 63:1; Psalm 69:1–3; Psalm 102:1–7. What causes the poet much pain?

The poet suffers personal troubles. Also, he fears that God is very far away. This fear upsets the poet more than all his personal suffering. The poet uses many word pictures to explain how he feels. He compares his worry to feeling thirsty in a land with no water (Psalm 42:1–3; Psalm 63:1). The poet's worry about God makes him feel sick enough to die (Psalm 102:2–4). The poet compares himself to lonely birds:

“I am like [the same as] a desert owl.
I am like an owl living among the ruins.
I lie awake.
I am like a lonely bird on a housetop” (Psalm 102:6, 7, ICB).

The “desert” is a word picture that helps us to see that the poet feels very alone and far away from God. A “lonely bird on a housetop” is not in its nest, where it can rest. The poet feels as if he were drowning and sinking down into heavy mud (Psalm 69:1–3; Psalm 130:1). Each of these word pictures shows us that the poet feels that he can't escape from His suffering without God's help.

Read Psalm 10:12; Psalm 22:1; Psalm 27:9; and Psalm 39:12. In these poems, the poet worries that God is far from him. How does that thought make the poet feel?

The poet refuses to stay silent when God doesn't answer His prayers. The poet's faith in prayer is strong. He believes that God is alive and loves to show His mercy to His children. The poet believes that God is there, even when He says nothing. The God who is silent today is the same God who answered the poet's prayers in the past. So, the poet believes that the Lord hears his prayers now.

When God doesn't answer the poet's prayers right away, the poet looks at his heart and life. He confesses his sins. He continues to pray and tell God his needs. The poet knows that God will not stay silent forever.

What can we learn from the poet's prayers to God when God does not answer him right away? What do you do when God is silent? What keeps your faith strong?



The poet feels as if he were drowning and sinking down into heavy mud (Psalm 69:1–3; Psalm 130:1).

DID GOD'S PROMISE FAIL? (Psalm 77)

What experience is the poet having in Psalm 77?

In Psalm 77, the poet starts with a prayer for help. The poet's memories about the past are painful (Psalm 77:1–6). The poet refuses any hope that doesn't come from God.

The poet's memories make him feel very sad. He feels worse the more he remembers the past. "God, I remembered you, and I groaned [moaned sadly]" (Psalm 77:3, NIV). The Hebrew word for "moan" is "**hamah**." The poets in the Book of Psalms used "**hamah**" to talk about how "the seas become rough and dark" during a storm (Psalm 46:3, ERV). In Psalm 77, the poet feels no rest or peace.

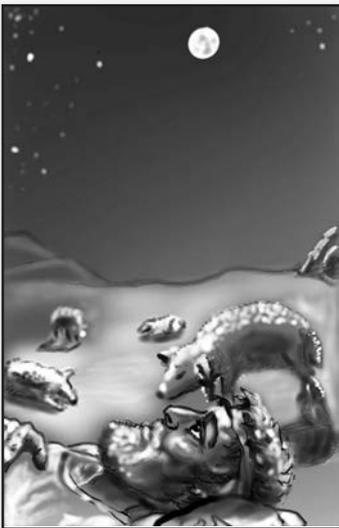
How can the poet's memory about God cause him to feel so upset? When we look at the questions the poet asks, we learn the reason why he feels so sad (Psalm 77:7–9). The poet wonders, Did God change? Will He keep His promise? Did He lose His power? Is He weak now?

In the past, God saved the poet. But now, God isn't answering his prayers. So, the poet feels that he is all alone. If God changed, then the poet will lose all hope. The poet refuses to believe this false idea.

In the meantime, the poet can't sleep. The Lord keeps him awake (Psalm 77:4). The poet's sleeping problems help us remember other Bible stories about other people who had trouble sleeping. God used their sleep problems to put His saving plan into action (Genesis 41:1–8; Esther 6:1; Daniel 2:1–3). When the poet lies awake at night, he remembers how the Lord saved His people in the past. When the poet remembers, he wants to serve God more (Psalm 77:5, 10).

Finally, God answers the poet. God's answer isn't filled with explanations for why the poet suffers now. God gives the poet reasons to continue to trust in Him. Now the poet is encouraged to wait on the Lord in faith. The poet knows that God is the same God who performed miracles in Israel's past (Psalm 77:11–18). The poet knows that God's people often can't see Him working for them: "Your path led through the Red Sea. You walked through the mighty waters. But your footprints were not seen" (Psalm 77:19, NIV).

Think about past times when the Lord worked in your life. How do those experiences help you in the hard times you may have now?



When the poet lies awake at night, he remembers how the Lord saved His people in the past.

**EVIL PEOPLE WILL NOT ALWAYS CONTROL
THE LAND (Psalm 125:3)**

Read Psalm 37:1, 8; Psalm 49:5–7; Psalm 94:3–7; and Psalm 125:3. What problem are these poems talking about?

In Psalm 37; Psalm 49; Psalm 94; and Psalm 125, the poet talks about evil people. The poet doesn't understand why evil people succeed. They don't hide their hatred for God. They hurt other people and aren't sorry. We are told that evil people will not always control the land (Psalm 125:3). We are told that God's kingdom will continue forever (Psalm 45:6). But sometimes we may think that evil people are winning and enjoying life. So, we may want to give up our faith and join the evil ones in a life of sin.

What helps the poet during a hard time? Read Psalm 73:1–20, 27 for the answer. What happens to people who don't trust in God? (Also read 1 Peter 1:17.)



Sometimes we may think that evil people are winning and enjoying life.

When the poet looked at the evil around him, he started to doubt God. The poet saw that evil people enjoyed much success. Their success caused the poet to doubt God's plan. The poet wondered, "Is it useless to have faith?"

Then the poet thinks about God's temple where God will judge all people. This Bible truth helps the poet understand that God is in control. Evil people may think they can do whatever they want in this life. But in the future, they will answer to God for everything they chose to do. When the poet understands this Bible truth, he knows that he was wrong to doubt God. He confesses his sin. Only God can help us understand what is important in life: we must live for Him, even when most everyone else around us is living for self and sin.

God will judge everyone who lived. God will judge all the evil that people do. How does this promise give you hope when so many people do evil that isn't punished now?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Psalm 56; Ellen G. White, “Rejoicing in the Lord,” pages 115–126, in *Steps to Christ*.

“When you suffer or are in trouble, look up, not down. Look to God. Don’t look at your problems or how difficult they are. When you look to God, you will always have courage. Soon you will see the hand of Jesus coming to help you. All you need to do is give Him your hand in faith. Let Him lead you. When you learn to trust Him, you will be filled with hope.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, pages 578, 579, adapted.

Do you sometimes feel that you are all alone? Or do you feel that God turned His face away from you? Keep praying. In dark times, the poets who wrote the Book of Psalms thought that God was far away. What did the poets do? They kept praying. They looked inside their hearts. They remembered God’s saving acts in the past. They confessed their sins to God. They continue to ask Him for help (Psalm 77:10–12; Psalm 89:46–52).

“Our faith grows strong when we meet with, and fight against, doubts and troubles. When we fight against doubts and troubles, we will learn an important lesson about life that will be worth more than the most precious jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 3, page 555, adapted.



“When you look to God,
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have courage.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What doubts and fears did the poets fight against? What things do you doubt and fear? How did you keep strong in faith during these hard times?
- ② Where should we look for answers when our faith in God is put to the test? What hope can you give to people whose suffering causes them to question God’s love?
- ③ How do you answer the question about why an all-powerful God of love allows evil to happen on this earth? How does the worldwide war between good and evil help answer this question?

SEKULE'S STORY (PART 1): GIVING UP ON GOD

Grandmother's warnings about hell scared five-year-old Sekule. Grandmother warned Sekule, "You must be a good boy. If you are bad, you'll end up in hell."

The boy asked, "What do you mean 'end up in hell'?"

Grandmother explained, "You'll end up in everlasting fire. You'll burn forever if you lie or steal. Then you will feel the hot flames always burning your body."

Grandmother's words made Sekule feel confused. On the one hand, Grandmother said that God is love. On the other hand, she said that if Sekule lied, he'd end up in hell. Sekule was afraid because he lied sometimes.

The boy didn't know what to do. His parents couldn't help him. They weren't Christians. Grandmother was the only Christian in the village.

A little later, Sekule hid behind a bush when no one was looking. Then he scolded God. Sekule said, "I don't know why people say You are love. You aren't love. You're a monster. Why did You make me if You only meant to burn me up in fire? Why should I have faith in You and not lie and do bad things when You are so mean and nasty? I **can't** believe in You. I **won't** believe in You. You are a monster."

Sekule was done with God. He was only five years old and had no interest in knowing God at all.

Nine years later, when Sekule was 14, his parents sent him away to school in Sarajevo. Sarajevo is the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 700 boys went to the school. Sekule was the only boy at school who was from the country of Montenegro. Sekule felt that his classmates would accept him if he was a good fighter. Sekule got into a fight almost every day. If someone touched one of his ears, he fought them. (Sekule had very funny-looking ears. They stuck out the same as teacup handles from both sides of his head. So, everyone loved to touch his ears, which made Sekule very mad.)

Sekule got a knife scar on his hand after a terrible fight. Sekule also was a bully. When a younger boy got a food package from home, Sekule stuck the boy out a window and hung him upside down from his ankles until the boy gave him the package.

After three years at school, Sekule wanted to know if he could have a better life than fighting. He wondered if Grandmother told him the truth about God. But what was the truth? In Sarajevo, there were Muslims, Catholics, and Jews. Sekule wondered, "If there is only one God, why are there so many religions?" Sekule decided to study all religions to find the truth.

Read more about Sekule Sekulić next week.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**"I won't believe in You.
You are a monster."**