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## Psalms for Skeptics (101-150)

Kent L. Gramm  
*Gettysburg College*

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## Psalms for Skeptics (101-150)

### **Description**

Sparked by phrases from the book of Psalms, these poems question and occasionally affirm our everyday ideas about life, mortality, the afterlife, God, family, and belief. In vigorous contemporary language—complaining, lamenting, and wisecracking on everything from Job's wife to baseball, crows to angels, circus elephants to Mary Magdalene—but in traditional form, these sonnets, or little songs, "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." [*From the publisher*]

### **Keywords**

Psalms, poetry, Bible

### **Disciplines**

Biblical Studies | Christianity | Poetry | Religion

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### **Comments**

Attached is Psalm 100-106 from Kent Gramm's book *Psalms for Skeptics*.

## Psalm 101

*O when wilt thou come unto me? (Advent)*

You come, I go: one sight of the white Light  
and this body drops alone, familiar bone  
cold forever, an undertaker's stone  
in a lake of my children's tears. All right.  
What's left to want but a sign, some surprise,  
kindness where the waters of memory  
part, Jesus? When you do come unto me—  
materialize to my lidded eyes—  
what will I be? How will I see what I  
don't want to see? What I am afraid of  
is what I want: the unsusposed glory  
that penetrates light, the postponed beauty,  
the starry child of everlasting love,  
the face of truth, beneficent and gory.

## Psalm 102

### *My heart is smitten*

My heart is smitten. Something happened here,  
inside, like a fire blown out with a bang.  
Fell, turned green, passed out. It wasn't a scare:  
it was the real thing. The fat lady sang  
like a locomotive. Me, on a cart,  
an hour from dead. They put me on a table  
and Jesus ran a wire into my heart,  
opened a tube; stepped back into fable—  
but I knew. He was there. He left a sign,  
an artifact, a feather: I mean me.  
I was immortal once upon a time,  
bore frankincense; unique, I used to be.  
But now I see I am a different self.  
Survived for now, like everybody else.

*my days are consumed like smoke*

I can't hear it, but I know it is ticking.  
The days go by with nothing done. Like smoke  
from a wispy fire—some dust-thin poems  
going out before they reach the flickering  
burn. Complain, why don't I?—that would burn  
still more of what is left, a paper tear  
on a paper face in a paper year  
in a paper space. Do they also serve  
who only sit and waste? But let Indian  
Summer come, the lazy childhood haze,  
bracing fragrant taste of leaves in the smoke,  
maples grateful to the all-gracious sun,  
and remembering youth going where it goes  
uncompleted, ripe, and smiling away.

*I am in trouble*

My heart is stricken: I will lose you all.  
“Where I am going, none of you may go.”  
What’s worse is where that is, none of us knows;  
still worse, we all know. Whatever you call  
it, it smells of flowers for awhile, dust  
on the face, the mortician’s after shave:  
what theological word rhymes with “grave”  
that doesn’t tremble on the lip of “lost”?

One night the Lord came to me in my sleep,  
looking handsome like David the Great King,  
O Israel, whose look, more powerful  
than horses, calls the universe like sheep  
from particles, Eternity in flower;  
and I was saved. And I will be waiting.

*But thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever.*

The only comfort is the only comfort.  
For what is hell but life eternal—that's  
it; just life eternal. Live forever,  
enemy! Just you and your friends. Quiet.  
Except for an exploding star now and  
then, cosmos expanding like an apple  
a thousand miles per second, the random  
black hole gulping like a hollow drain, and  
so on and so on. You will get damn sick  
of your friends. Go see the fireworks every  
night, all night; one long night. You will all wish  
you were dead. That this satire of heaven  
would have had a Maker. That the humming  
in all that dark matter would mean something.

## Psalm 103

*Bless the Lord, O my soul*

O bless the Lord, my soul, whoever you  
may be, you keeper of our memories:  
you, whom I call mine though I am yours—I,  
the day-to-day perception and illusion,  
the child of the unconscious mind, body's  
bedfellow, servant, and traducer, dead  
in a sweet dream of aphrodesia, dead  
in the lost cause of astronomy: me,  
loved?—not the clothes horse I know. But someone  
I don't know who knows me is loved: you  
the aromatic of the lotus rose,  
beloved of the one and only One,  
loved, loved—and you know what I only wound  
and crucify: bless the Lord, O my soul!



## Psalm 104

*thou art clothed with honor and majesty*

What clothing! O Lord my God, we worship  
your clothes. Our God's a fashionable God;  
no Presbyterian. New money. Not  
a Catholic. Evangelical—furnished  
with effective praise—no make-up except  
will, lots of it, nothing but it, explaining  
things to us inerrantly on the page—  
a potentate to pagans. When the step-  
son appeared we were rightly skeptical  
and remain so. He was everything You  
are not—visible in the dark, insolvent.  
He walked, he loved, he ridiculed, he slept.  
You tried to save him from his followers,  
but there was nothing You could do.

## Psalm 105

*sing psalms unto him (a)*

I'd like to have an audience of One—  
but then again, I'm not so sure—who knows  
aesthetics and appreciates a rhyme  
that's just a hint in a rhythmic poem  
even when the candy of its images  
is metallic as blood, or when all you  
get is visual assonance—ambiguity  
be damned sometimes, when what the poem says  
is all it says, as if Lord Tennyson  
had eaten Eliot for breakfast, won—  
an audience appreciative of form,  
who sits up nights admiring human wit;  
sly, kind, ironic, sad. [Here, warm applause  
from the audience inside the poet.]

*sing psalms unto him (b)*

Unto whom else? Many of us have no  
reader but the One who hears in secret:  
“for I say unto you, when you pray, go  
alone into your room and close your door;  
the One who hears in secret will reward  
you.” On the busy streets no one will know  
I was not good enough for anyone  
but myself. (I planned to write “anyone  
but God,” but who could be that good or bad?  
Is God who wants my poetry only  
in my head?—He and I two kindly old  
gents content, yea, pleased, with the mediocre;  
one formerly in shorts—tan, grassy lad;  
the other a Whirlwind of white and gold.)

*seek his face*

Your face is home, and nothing else we have  
is ours. The universe's filigree  
of fire and colors and geometry  
a billion billion deep is its own grave,  
a vast performance of holes and splendor  
perishing: an image always leaving  
its mirror in our mind, magician's sleeve,  
a shimmering house with its key next door  
in Grampa's overalls pocket. He sits  
at his little kitchen table, coffee  
in an old cup warmed up from yesterday,  
sugar cube a diamond die of snow, listening  
to the radio, musing memories,  
begetting you and everything he sees.

## Psalm 106

*they soon forgot his works*

The supersized blue star Rigel, sixty  
thousand times brighter than the sun, collapses  
someday soon: its heated sacrifices—  
the nitrogen of sons and daughters stripped  
and spread across wide open spaces of waste—  
will hollow out its core like a nation  
sucking the blood of its poor. Thin marrow  
sipped from their bones, they become dry shadows  
circling to the bottom of a hand cupped  
around a black and blood-stained hole—erupting  
to a supernova—flambeau of gas  
blue, white, red—wild excess!—its shredding flower  
the settling shoulder of Orion's power.  
Heed, ye heathen!—the heavy torch is passed.

*they murmured in their tents*

They murmured in their tents, some centuries  
before they were Jews—just Joe and Susie  
Blow in the desert: something anybody  
would have done—Arabs, campers, Comanches,  
men, women. A tent is made for murmuring—  
for a muffled, airy cinnamon breeze  
under colored shade, warm afternoon peace—  
made for murmuring and for being heard—  
murmuring like water, murmuring like  
a distant caravan, murmuring like  
people lying looking up at the stars;  
and who in the world do we think we are  
to sleep under these stitches of glittering light?

*he is good*

The Lord is good, and everything is one.  
I can't believe Nels Mickleson is dead,  
so set my memory of him—face red,  
alive. What do I care for sunken bones,  
stones, or all the comfort under the sun?  
Lord, let me see him on his porch again—  
the one on Ninth Street—but as he was then  
and not in memory. Memory's done.  
The heart's done. It's just a matter of time  
and it will all be done—everything one:  
one old stone in the cold—or in the mind  
of Mr. Mickelson, the universe  
drawing in like sand down the rounding course  
of his life, in that chair, in the sublime.