



# Where Are You, God?

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**Focus Scripture**  
**Psalm 80:1–7,**  
**17–19**

Additional Scriptures  
Isaiah 64:1–9  
1 Corinthians 1:3–9  
Mark 13:24–37

God our Shepherd,  
you lead us from  
fear and despair  
into your land of  
promise. You come  
to our aid and  
set us free. Grant  
that, in this Advent  
season, we may  
wait with patience  
for the revealing of  
your salvation in  
your son, Jesus the  
Christ. Amen.

**W**ith the psalmist, we cry out to God: where are you? We long for a restored relationship, to know that God is with us. As we enter Advent, Isaiah and Mark remind us to be alert, to be ready for God's appearing in our midst. In confidence and hope, we affirm with Paul that God will strengthen us to the end.

## Focus Scripture: Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

The Bible contains different kinds of psalms. Psalm 80 is a national lament, a corporate crying out to God by the people of Israel in time of danger. It follows a pattern: the address to God describing God's goodness, a description of what has gone wrong in the nation's history, a complaint, and then a prayer for help. The psalm's refrain (verses 3, 7, 19) indicates its use in communal worship.

The psalmist describes God enthroned on the cherubim, a reference to the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden box with golden carvings of heavenly beings, said to contain the stone tablets with God's law – the visible sign of God's presence with Israel. God's face shines; all light comes from God. God's face shining upon the people is an image of God being with them; they plead that God's face may shine on them again.

The psalm laments the tragedy that has come upon the northern kingdom of Israel, which included the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BCE. Some of the people were carried away into exile. Neighbouring states taunted Israel – where was their God when defeat and destruction came? The people of Israel are in mourning; they feel as if tears have become their food and drink.

Verses 1–3 form a kind of confession of faith, a public declaration of who God is: God is Israel's shepherd. This is a frequently used image in scripture. Like the shepherd, God guards and protects. God nourishes and sustains. God leads and provides, just as God led Joseph. The people call upon God to lead them once again in paths of safety and prosperity.

Later, a defining moment in Hebrew history was the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon in 586 BCE. Communal laments speak to such times as these. Scholars do not agree on the historical context

of Psalm 80, but this uncertainty does not prevent it from speaking to all God's people who suffer because of political troubles.

A time of national chaos frames the prophecy in Isaiah. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE and many of the people of Judah were taken into exile in Babylon. In **Isaiah 64:1–9**, the prophet appeals directly to God to come down and save the people. Calamity has come because the people have turned away from God's way. Yet God is the creator. God has awesome power, and has done great deeds in the past. God is the only hope.

**Mark 13:24–37** was written at a time when the young Christian communities were undergoing persecution, probably between 65 and 75 CE. The Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 70 CE, and there was great suffering at the hands of the Romans during this era. Mark reminds these first readers of the gospel, and us, that God is very near. We must keep awake for we do not know when God will come to save us. Paul reinforces the message in **1 Corinthians 1:3–9**, encouraging the early church in Corinth, and us, with the promise that God is faithful and will strengthen us to the end.



We live in a world with social disruption and open conflict. With the psalmist, we may feel powerless to effect change. We wonder where God is – even if, perhaps, God has turned away from us. We long for order, wholeness, and healing change. In Advent, we wait in confidence and hope that the fullness of God's salvation will come among us. What does it mean for you and your church to be alert for God's restoring work in the world today and in the time to come? What will you do as you wait?

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