

PRAISE GOD FOR PAST DELIVERANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 107:33-43

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 107

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Psalm 107:1-9, 39-43

I. God of the Redeemed

Psalm 107:1-9

- ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**
- ² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell
their story—
those he redeemed from the
hand of the foe,**
- ³ those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north
and south.**
- ⁴ Some wandered in desert waste-
lands,
finding no way to a city where
they could settle.**
- ⁵ They were hungry and thirsty,
and their lives ebbed away.**
- ⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in
their trouble,
and he delivered them from their
distress.**
- ⁷ He led them by a straight way
to a city where they could settle.**
- ⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD
for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for
mankind,**
- ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty
and fills the hungry with good
things.**

1. This call to worship before us is in

the imperative—the people must *give thanks to the Lord*.

The theme of this verse was expressed earlier in Israel's history when the ark of the covenant was brought into the temple at Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 5:13) and again when the temple was dedicated (7:3).

This may imply that a psalm David had given to Asaph previously is a background to Psalm 107 (1 Chronicles 16:7-8). The same may be true of the song in Ezra 3:10-11, when the foundation of the second temple was dedicated by those who had traveled to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon.

2. Christians often think of being *redeemed* as primarily spiritual in nature, something especially accomplished by Jesus (Ephesians 1:7). But redemption in earthly terms has a long history in Israel. The formative story of the exodus from Egypt is the account of God's redeeming the Hebrew slaves from their bondage. The book of Ruth shows redemption in action on a smaller scale (Ruth 2:1; 4:1-6).

The redeemed come out of their dire situations because of God's intercession. In Ruth's case, God's work came long before, in the form of laws that gave her the opportunity to be redeemed by a relative of her dead husband. The exiles who returned from Babylon experienced God's restoration on a grand scale.

In these and all other situations, those who have been redeemed by *the Lord* must *tell their story*. How could the nation be a light to all peoples if they never told about the wonderful things God had done for them? Those who have been redeemed *from the hand of the foe* by God's intercession must give him the credit.

3. Reading the curses in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, we notice that some of the same language is in our passage. These include being *gathered* from captivity in Psalm 107:2-3, and words such as “oppression,” “calamity,” and “sorrow” in 107:39 fit the circumstances described in the curses. The Lord had promised that his people would go into exile if they refused to obey him (Deuteronomy 28:64). But he also promised that if the people would return to him in their captivity, he would “gather [them] again from all the nations where he scattered [them]” (30:3).

Here the promised deliverance is celebrated; the Lord has indeed gathered his people, bringing them home from exile (Isaiah 49:12). This reversal accomplishes what a previous psalm had hoped for (Psalm 105:44). To this we can compare the future gathering of all God's redeemed (Luke 13:29-30).

4a. The reference to wandering in *desert wastelands* brings to mind the Israelites' 40-year punishment for failing to trust the Lord following the exodus of 1447 BC (Numbers 14:30-35). The immediate context in Psalm 107 should also remind the reader of the plight and peril of the journey into Babylonian exile of 586 BC. The words *desert* and *wastelands* are also translated “wilderness” in the Old Testament (Psalms 78:40; 106:14).

4b. No matter where they wandered, the people had found *no way to a city where they could settle* for refuge and permanency in terms of the 40-year punishment. During the later exile to Babylon, they trav-

eled until their captors told them they had reached their destination (Psalm 137:1).

5. When one has insufficient food and water, the impact is more than just physical. The results are felt deep within; despondency and hopelessness soon characterize one's very life.

6. The turning point for those in *trouble* and *distress* wasn't the Lord's deliverance—the turning point was repentance. The people's cry *to the Lord* was one of faith that accompanied such change of heart (Ezekiel 14:6). The word *delivered* echoes the concept of redemption found in Psalm 107:2.

7. The people's wandering (Psalm 107:4) was replaced by a clear direction from the Lord. Whereas before they had nowhere to put down roots, they found *a city where they could settle*.

Jerusalem needed a lot of work before it was safe again. But if the Lord could bring them back to the city, he could certainly ensure that it was rebuilt and habitable.

8. The experiences recorded in the previous two verses are just a sample of examples of the Lord's *unfailing love*. The Lord's *wonderful deeds* are not and never have been limited to one generation.

9. Older translations of the Bible have “longing” in place of *thirsty*, evoking a dire need for water. The verse before us recalls the lack of food and water described in Psalm 107:5. Lack was replaced with adequate means of sustaining life.

The Lord is willing and able to reverse peoples' circumstances. Jesus' ministry was full of examples of his acting on behalf of suffering people. And in the first-century church, we see quite a surprising reversal: the acceptance of Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Acts 10:44-48).

II. God of Reversals

Psalm 107:39-43

³⁹ Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled

by oppression, calamity and sorrow;

⁴⁰ he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste.

⁴¹ But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks.

⁴² The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.

⁴³ Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

39. Psalm 107:33-38 further recounts the Lord's reversals of distress to blessing. It is he who can bring about or allow a fruitful land to become barren as punishment for wickedness, which might manifest as spiritual apathy or outright idolatry.

Those who had once flourished under God's blessing didn't seem to learn the lessons of previous generations. So a cycle of *oppression, calamity, and sorrow* would begin anew; this is a major theme of the book of Judges. Though Israelite numbers had increased, disobedience resulted in their population being *decreased*.

It's tempting to do an in-depth study of the three words *oppression, calamity, and sorrow* individually to try to get at what specifically was involved with each one. But such an approach runs the danger of missing the bigger picture of the cumulative effect of those three.

Reversals of life situations as seen throughout Psalm 107 served God's disciplinary purposes. But they were not his desire. What he desired was obedience. The sharpest examples of this discipline are the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.

⁴⁰. *Nobles* are not exempt by their status from God's discipline (Luke 1:52).

Humbling of the powerful and mighty is demonstrated throughout Scripture.

⁴¹. The humbling of nobles stands in sharp contrast to the Lord's lifting of *the needy*. This language brings to mind the reversals described in the prayers of Hannah and Mary. Though Mary's prayer, sometimes called "Mary's Song," is usually considered during the Christmas season, we can and should celebrate by remembering her trust throughout the year: "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors" (Luke 1:54-55).

⁴². *The upright* are those who follow the Lord's ways and view people and situations as he does. Such people *see* the series of circumstances described in the previous verses and *rejoice* to see such reversals take place. They know that these circumstances have not happened as the result of mere chance. The Lord is the true ruler of the world, and he can reverse people's situations. *The wicked* are left speechless (Romans 3:19).

⁴³. *Wise* people get that way as they *heed* the *things* described in the previous verses and see in them manifestations of *the loving deeds of the Lord*. The Hebrew word translated as "loving deeds" is repeated throughout the psalm. This indicates an obvious theme throughout Psalm 107, as the chapter is bookended with an emphasis on God's love and loving deeds.

Some of the Lord's actions described in this psalm may not seem very loving. But they reflect a system of corrective justice and judgment that a loving, caring God set in motion to uphold his principles of righteous conduct. Human beings are not left to wonder what God's standards are.

God's love is demonstrated to all people (Matthew 5:45). But the wise have a greater understanding of and gratitude for how much God's loving deeds impact daily life.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

PRAISE GOD FOR PAST DELIVERANCE

Into the Lesson

After completing the activity described in the Teacher Book, answer the following question: How does it feel to be required to do things before being set free?

All of us have sought and received deliverance from something that bound us at one time or another. Let's see how the psalmist handled such an issue.

Into the Word

Read Psalm 107 and answer the following questions:

Why thank the Lord?

What trouble did the people experience?

What good things does the Lord do?

What punishments does God inflict on those who disobey him?

What blessing did God provide for those in need?

What should be the conclusion of those who consider what God has done?

Into Life

Based on personal experiences, experiences of your family, experiences on the mission field, or experiences in your church, answer the following prompt:

A time I realized God's deliverance was . . .

If you think carefully, you can see God's hand of deliverance in smaller experiences every day—experiences you may overlook. How has this been true for you this week?

Describe the most recent way you've seen God's loving hand at work in your life.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

We can never praise the Lord too much!