

Psalm 106

Israel sins against God's love

Psalm 106: This psalm is one of national lament, though it might also be classified as a historical psalm (compare chapters 78, 105). Like Psalm 105, it traces the history of Israel, but for a different purpose. In the former psalm, the emphasis was on God's grace and faithfulness; in this psalm, it is on the people's faithlessness and the Lord's justice. (Verse 47), has been interpreted to imply that the setting of the psalm was the Babylonian captivity. This is not necessarily true, however, because the reference is quite general and there were many periods when the Israelites were oppressed by the heathen. The psalm may be divided into three key sections. First, there is a call to praise (verses 1-5). Second, a confession of Israel's past sins (verses 6-46), takes up the bulk of the psalm. In this part, after an introductory identification of present-day sins with the past (verse 6), the psalmist traces a history of rebellion and unbelief on the part of God's people. These occasions of disbelief included the Exodus (verses 7-12), the wanderings in the wilderness (verses 13-23), the events at Kadesh-barnea (verses 24-27; compare Num. 13:32; 14:41), the encampment at Shittim (verses 28-31), and occurrences within the Promised Land itself (verses 32-46). Finally, the psalmist concludes with a twofold petition, "save us ... gather us", with a twofold purpose, "to give thanks ... and to triumph" (verse 47). This last psalm in the fourth book of the Psalms ends with the now familiar doxology (verse 48).

Verses 1-48: Psalm 106 rehearses God's mercy during Israel's history in spite of Israel's sinfulness (compare Neh. 9:1-38; Psalm 78; Isa. 63:7-64; Ezek. 10:1-44; Dan. 9:1-19; Acts 7:2-53; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). The occasion for this psalm is most likely the repentance (verse 6), of post-Exilic Jews who had returned to Jerusalem (verses 46-47). Verses (1, 47-48), seem to be borrowed from (1 Chron. 16:34-36), which was sung on the occasion of the Ark's first being brought to Jerusalem by David (compare 2 Sam. 6:12-19; 1 Chron. 16:1-7). True revival appears to be the psalmist's intention.

- I. The Invocation (106:1-5).
- II. The Identification with Israel's Sins (106:6).
- III. The Confession of Israel's Sins (106:7-46).
- IV. The Plea for Salvation (106:47).
- V. The Benediction (106:48).

Verses 1-5: None of our sins or sufferings should prevent our ascribing glory and praise to the Lord. The more unworthy we are, the more is his kindness to be admired. And those who depend on the Redeemer's righteousness will endeavor to copy his example, and by word and deed to show forth his praise. God's people have reason to be cheerful people; and need not envy the children of men their pleasure or pride.

Psalm 106:1 "Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for [he is] good: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

“Good ... Mercy”: These attributes of God are especially praiseworthy to the psalmist in light of Israel’s historical sin pattern (compare 106:6-46).

This Psalm begins with praise unto the LORD. Every generation of God's people can look at this and join in with praise and thanksgiving at the goodness of God. I am simply amazed, as I study my Bible, at the patience and mercy of God toward a people who are dead set on displeasing God. In this particular Psalm, David will be looking at the terrible murmuring that the Israelites did on the way to the Promised Land. It seems that all through the ages, people soon forget the blessings that God has showered upon them and fall away from God. It is no different even now. If they have not been blessed in the last five minutes, they go wandering away to find solutions to their problems in the wrong places. I believe David to be the penman here, and he is encouraging all of us to take time out to praise and worship God.

Verses 2-3: Verse 2 asks the question answered (in verse 3).

Psalm 106:2 "Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? [who] can show forth all his praise?"

Or powers; to which answers the Greek word for the miracles of Christ (Matt. 11:20). And Kimchi here restrains them to the wonders wrought in Egypt, and at the Red sea. But they may as well be extended to the mighty acts of God, and the effects of his power, in the creation of all things out of nothing. In the sustaining and government of the world; in the redemption of his people by Christ; in the conversion of sinners, and in the final perseverance of the saints. In all which there are such displays of the power of God as cannot be uttered and declared by mortal tongues.

"Who can show forth all his praise": Hebrew, "Cause to be heard." That is, Language cannot be found which would cause "it to be heard" in a suitable manner.

We are not even capable of remembering every little blessing that God has done for us. The English language is not sufficient to tell of His mighty acts. We really do not even know of most of His mighty acts. We have a small sprinkle of them in the Bible, but this is just a few of the many wonderful acts of the LORD.

John 21:25 "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

If I spent the rest of my life praising Him, it would not be enough. I would run out of time, before I was through.

Psalm 106:3 "Blessed [are] they that keep judgment, [and] he that doeth righteousness at all times."

They are blessed, for their conduct is right, and it leads to happiness. The Hebrew is, "the keepers of judgment;" that is, they who observe the rules of justice in their conduct, or who are governed by the principles of integrity.

"And he that doeth righteousness at all times": All who yield obedience to just law, whether a nation or an individual. The psalm is designed to illustrate this "by contrast;" that is, by showing, in the conduct of the Hebrew people, the consequences of "disobedience." And thus, impliedly what would have been, and what always must be, the consequences of the opposite course (compare Psalm 15:1-5).

God has given us a perfect way of life. If we live by it, He will bless us abundantly. The desire of our heart must be to do the will of the Father. There was much emphasis in the Old Testament on keeping the feast days and doing the sacrifices, but even then, God wanted obedience more than He wanted sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey [is] better than sacrifice, [and] to hearken than the fat of rams."

Verses 4-5: The psalmist has the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant in mind (see note on Psalm 105:9-10). He prays here for personal deliverance (verse 4), and later for national deliverance (verse 47).

Psalm 106:4 "Remember me, O LORD, with the favor [that thou bearest unto] thy people: O visit me with thy salvation;"

Literally, "Remember me with the favor of thy people." This is the language of the author of the psalm: a pious ejaculation such as will occur to the mind in recounting what God has done for his church. What are the advantages of being his friends; what blessings of peace, happiness, and joy are connected with true religion. Even the wicked sometimes have this feeling when they look on the happy life, and the peaceful death of the godly. So Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Num. 23:10).

"O visit me with thy salvation": Come to me with salvation; confer it upon me.

One of the greatest rewards in reading the Exodus is the wonderful kindness and mercy God afforded these rebellious people. It gives us extra hope that God will forgive us, as well of our shortcomings. This verse above is saying, forgive me like you did them. "O visit me with thy salvation", is a statement looking prophetically to Jesus.

Psalm 106:5 "That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."

Thy chosen people; or, thine elect. That I may possess and enjoy the same favor and happiness which they do. It is implied here that there are special favors conferred on them; or, that happiness is found in the friendship of God which is not to be found elsewhere. It is a characteristic of true piety to desire to make that our own. A truly religious man more desires the happiness which results from being among the "chosen" of God than all that the world can confer.

"That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation": The happiness found in the nation that serves thee. True religion, the favor of God, not only confers happiness on the "individual" who possesses it, but on the nation or people where it prevails. It is just as much suited to produce happiness there, and is just as necessary for happiness there, as in the case of an individual.

"That I may glory with thine inheritance": That I may share the honor of thy people. The word "inheritance" here is used to denote that which is one's own, and is thus applied to the people of God considered as "his." The meaning is, that the psalmist desired no other glory, honor, or distinction, than that which pertained to God's people as such. He sought not the "glory" connected with the distinctions of the world. The display of wealth; the triumph of genius, of conquest, of arms, but the "glory" of being a friend of God, and of partaking of that which God confers on his people.

The penman here, is crying out for the blessings of the chosen of God. This is probably David and he is saying, I am part of that family of Abraham who the blessings will come through. Bless me, for I am part of the inheritance.

Psalm 106:6 "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly."

"We ... fathers": The psalmist acknowledges the perpetual sinfulness of Israel, including that of his own generation.

The penman is confessing his sins before the Father. He is also saying that his ancestors sinned and were forgiven. They are not in this by themselves. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Praise God! We Christians are forgiven of all our iniquity. Not even one person, aside from Jesus, has ever lived on this earth a perfect life. Our hope is in Jesus. He took our sin and traded us His righteousness. We now are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Verses 7-12: This section recalls the crossing of the Red Sea during the Exodus by the nation, when Pharaoh and his army were in pursuit (compare Exodus 14:1-31).

Psalm 106:7 "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked [him] at the sea, [even] at the Red sea."

They did not fully comprehend the design of the divine dealings. They did not perceive the greatness of the favor shown to them, or the obligation to obey and serve God under which they were placed by these remarkable manifestations.

"Thy wonders in Egypt": The miracles performed there in behalf of the Hebrew people.

"They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies": The great number of the divine interpositions in their behalf. They did not allow them to influence their conduct as they should have done. The aggravation of their offence in the case here referred to was particularly in the "multitude" of the mercies. It would have been sinful to have forgotten even one act of the divine favor. It was a great aggravation of their guilt that "so many" acts were forgotten, or that they failed to make an impression on them. So now. It is a great sin to be unmindful of a "single" favor conferred by God. It is a great aggravation of guilt that men live continually amidst so many proofs of the divine goodness. That they are fed, and clothed, and protected. That they breathe the pure air, and look upon the light of the sun. That they enjoy the comforts of domestic life, the blessings of liberty, and the offers of salvation. That they lie down and rise up; that their toils are crowned with success, and that the blessings of every land are made to come around them. And yet they forget or disregard all these proofs of the divine mercy.

"But provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea" (Exodus 14:10-12; see note on Exodus 13:18). They "rebelled" against him. Even amidst the wonders there occurring, and after all the blessings which they had received at his hands, when they were in danger they doubted his power, and called in question his faithfulness.

When the first real test came upon these Israelites, they forgot that God had delivered them with the ten plagues out of Egypt. They panicked at the Red Sea. They saw the sea before them, and did not trust God to get them out of this problem. Isn't that just the way we are? God has taken the Christians out of Egypt the (world), with no help from us. The first time we face a problem, we forget that He is the answer. If He can take them out of Egypt, He can help them cross the Red Sea. Do you have any mountain or river to cross? I know the One who can take you to the other side.

Psalm 106:8 "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known."

"His name's sake": The glory and reputation of God provide the highest motive for His actions. This frequent Old Testament phrase appears 6 other places in the Psalms (compare Psalms 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 109:21; 143:11).

The marvelous thing to me, is that He saved them, even though they did not have faith to believe. He had defamed the gods of Egypt, now He would show beyond a shadow of doubt that the LORD is God. All the lands around would be afraid of the God of the Israelites after this incident.

Verses 9-11: The crossing of the Red Sea (is described in Exodus chapter 14).

Psalm 106:9 "He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness."

"He rebuked the Red Sea": This reliable historical account recalls a true supernatural miracle of God (compare Exodus 14:21-22), just as He would later provide a way for the nation to cross the Jordan into the land (compare Joshua 3:14-17).

God has power over all the elements. The sea had to obey the voice of God. Not only did the sea separate and stand in a heap on either side, but the ground in the bed of the sea dried up and they walked through on dry ground.

Psalm 106:10 "And he saved them from the hand of him that hated [them], and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy."

As Pharaoh and his people did, because of their numerous increase, which they endeavored to prevent. And still more because of the plagues inflicted on them. And now because they were gotten away from them, and therefore pursued them in great wrath and indignation (Exodus 15:9).

"And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy": The same thing in different words; so the Lord Christ has saved and redeemed his people out of the hand of all their spiritual enemies. And those that hate them and war against them, as sin, Satan, and the world (Luke 1:71).

Psalm 106:11 "And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left."

They pursuing the Israelites into the sea, the waters returned, and covered Pharaoh and all his host, and drowned them. So that they sunk as a stone, and as lead into the bottom of the sea (Exodus 14:28).

"There was not one of them left": To return back to Egypt, and give an account of what became of the army (Exodus 14:28). An emblem this of the utter destruction of all our spiritual enemies by Christ. Who has not only saved us from them, but has entirely destroyed them. He has made an end of sin, even of all the sins of his people. He has spoiled Satan and his principalities and powers; he has abolished death, the last enemy, and made his saints more than conquerors over all. Likewise, it may be a representation of the destruction of the wicked at the last day, who will be all burnt up at the general conflagration, root and branch, not one will be left (see Mal. 4:1).

"There was not one of them left": As recorded in Exodus 14:28 (compare Psalm 78:53).

Pharaoh's men and chariots drowned in the sea. They never pursued the Israelites any more. The Israelites walked through the Red Sea on dry land and just as soon as they were safely on the other side, God allowed the Pharaoh's men to pursue them through the sea, and the sea drowned every one of them.

Psalm 106:12 "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise."

"They sang his praise": The Song of Moses is in view (compare Exodus 15:1-21).

Praise and thanksgiving were plentiful at the Red Sea, after the drowning of the Egyptians. The sad thing is how quickly these people forget.

Verses 13-33: Those that will not wait for God's counsel, shall justly be given up to their own hearts' lusts, to walk in their own counsels. An undue desire, even for lawful things, becomes sinful. God showed his displeasure for this. He filled them with uneasiness of mind, terror of conscience, and self-reproach. Many that fare deliciously every day, and whose bodies are healthful, have leanness in their souls: no love to God, no thankfulness, no appetite for the Bread of life, and then the soul must be lean. Those wretchedly forget themselves, that feast their bodies and starve their souls. Even the true believer will see abundant cause to say, it is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed. Often have we set up idols in our hearts, and cleaved to some forbidden object. So that if a greater than Moses had not stood to turn away the anger of the Lord, we should have been destroyed. If God dealt severely with Moses for unadvised words, what do those deserve who speak many proud and wicked words? It is just in God to remove those relations that are blessings to us, when we are peevish and provoking to them, and grieve their spirits. This section remembers the nation's wanderings in the wilderness (compare Num. chapter 14; Deut. Chapter 34).

Verses 13-15: The Jews forgot what God had most recently done on their behalf, but:

- (1) Remembered the basics of life that Egypt provided, and
- (2) Doubted that they would have water (compare Exodus 15:24), or food (compare Exodus 16:2-3), in the future.

Israel "tempted God" with their selfish requests. "He gave them" what they wanted, but their craving ended in sickness. Their impatience rushed them to premature death (Num. 11:18-33).

Psalm 106:13 "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:"

The miracles he wrought in Egypt, the deliverance of them from thence with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, and the leading them through the Red sea as on dry land. And destroying all their enemies. All these they soon forgot, for they had gone but three days' journey into the wilderness after this, before they began to murmur and show distrust of the power and providence of God (Exodus 15:22). It is in the Hebrew text, "they made haste, they forgot his works"; as soon as they were out of Egypt, they were for entering into the land of Canaan at once, and were much displeased that they were not immediately led into it.

"They waited not for his counsel": They did not ask counsel of God, though it belongs to him, and he is wonderful in it, and does all things after the counsel of his own will. Nor would they take it when given by Moses and Joshua. They did not choose to wait his time and way of

working. They were for limiting the Holy One of Israel to their time and way. They were for being in the land of Canaan before his time; and were for eating flesh, when it was his counsel to feed on manna he provided for them every day.

God called these people who constantly complained, murmurers. At every problem, they complained instead of trusting God. Possibly one reason God allowed them to have so many problems was, so they would finally learn to trust Him.

Psalm 106:14 "But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert."

Margin, as in Hebrew, "lusted a lust." The reference is to their desire of better food than the manna.

"And tempted God in the desert": Tried God, whether he "could" provide for them food and drink (Psalm 78:19-20).

As I said, they were never satisfied. They spent all of their time complaining. Had God not been so longsuffering, He would have killed them in the wilderness.

Psalm 106:15 "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul."

Flesh and feathered fowl in great abundance (see Psalm 78:27). So, God sometimes gives to wicked men what they ask for, as much as they can desire, yea, more than heart could wish.

"But sent leanness into their soul": Either into their persons; or rather, their bodies, which are oft understood by this word. Of which see the notes upon (Psalm 16:10). So their inordinate desire of pleasing and pampering their bodies was the occasion of destroying them. While God denied his blessing, which alone makes food able to nourish us, and inflicted his curse, which made their food as destructive as poison to them.

He answered their requests through Moses, they were not joyful in their souls. God inhabits the praises of His people. To have fatness in your soul takes fellowship with God. They had no fellowship with God. They spent all their time complaining.

Verses 16-18: Korah, who is not named here, led the rebellion that is recounted (compare Num. 16:1-35). God's judgment concluded with fire which consumed 250 men (compare Num. 16:35).

Psalm 106:16 "They envied Moses also in the camp, [and] Aaron the saint of the LORD."

They were envious of him, or rebelled against him, as assuming too much authority (see Num. 16:1-2). The reference here is rather to the "result" of that envy in producing rebellion than to the envy itself. It is true, however, that the foundation of their opposition to him "was" envy.

"And Aaron the saint of the Lord": That is, as set apart to the service of the Lord. Or, as employed in holy things. The reference is to his "office," not to his personal character.

Even though Moses had been instigated in getting them out of the hard bondage in Egypt, they were jealous of him. They did not understand why God had chosen Moses over them. They did not realize that Moses was a very humble man. God had chosen Moses, because God knew Moses' heart. Aaron was of a very special family. God had chosen him to help Moses. Moses or Aaron did not ask for this special anointing from God. They did not ask to be chosen. God chose them. A great deal of responsibility goes along with being chosen of God to do a particular job.

Psalm 106:17 "The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram."

One of the heads of the conspirators against Moses and Aaron. The earth clave asunder under him and his company; opened itself, or its mouth, and devoured them at once. This was a new, marvelous, and unheard of thing, and which manifestly showed the divine displeasure and resentment at their proceedings. And served greatly to confirm the authority and office of Moses and Aaron (see Num. 16:30).

"And covered the company of Abiram": Another of the heads of the confederacy. Korah is not mentioned, though the earth swallowed him up and all that belonged to him, their houses and their goods. Some think the reason is because it was well known that this was his case, when Dathan and Abiram are not so expressly mentioned in the history by Moses. As also because the sons of Korah were now in esteem as singers. Nor is On the son of Peleth mentioned, because, as Kimchi says, he repented, and desisted from the conspiracy.

Dathan was opposed to God's servants, and God opened up the earth and swallowed them. Like an earthquake. Abiram was destroyed at the same time. It is a very dangerous thing to come against the anointed of God, or against God. God may not instantly punish, but He will not forget. They will be punished.

Psalm 106:18 "And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked."

This seems to be the company of Korah, or however a part of it. The two hundred and fifty men that had censers, and so were of the Levitical race, as Korah was. This fire came from the Lord out of heaven.

"The flame burned up the wicked": The two hundred and fifty men with censers (Num. 16:35), this was an emblem of that fire which shall consume those that hurt the witnesses. Or of that vengeance of eternal fire which wicked men will suffer forever.

The Levites were destroyed in this fire. Korah was destroyed, as well. At a later time, Korah's family were forgiven. It seems the earth swallowed Dathan and Abiram, and the fire killed Korah.

Verses 19-23: This section remembers when the nation convinced Aaron to make a golden calf for idol worship while Moses was on the mountain receiving the commandments of God (compare Exodus 32:1-14; Deut. 9:7-21).

Verses 19-21: The episode of the golden calf (is recorded Exodus chapter 32).

Psalm 106:19 "They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image."

“Horeb”: Most likely another name for Mt. Sinai (compare Exodus 19:11). This special place, called “the mountain of God” (compare Exodus 3:1; 1 Kings 19:8), is where Moses received the commandments of God (Deut. 1:6; 5:2; 29:1; Mal 4:4).

While Moses was on the mountain with God 40 days and nights waiting for the 10 commandments, the people talked Aaron into making them a golden calf to worship. When Moses came down the mountain, he heard revelry in the camp. The people were worshipping the golden calf.

Psalm 106:20 "Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass."

Their true glory, the proper object of worship, God (compare notes Rom. 1:23). They "exchanged" that as an object of worship for the image of an ox.

"Into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass": Into the likeness of an ox. That is, they worshipped God under that image. The circumstance of its "eating grass" is added to show the absurdity of the act. Instead of worshipping God, an independent Being, who does not need to be supported, but who himself sustains all things. And provides for all, they worshipped an animal that had need of constant sustenance, and would itself soon die if deprived of its proper nourishment (compare the notes at Isa 40:18-20; 41:6-7).

The calf was one of the false gods in Egypt. They had made a golden image of the false god. They were worshipping it, when Moses came down the mountain. How soon they forgot that this was one of the false gods the Almighty God had defamed. The only true God brought them out of bondage in Egypt. He held the Egyptians off, while they crossed on dry land in the bottom of the Red Sea. He killed the Egyptians, so they would not follow them. Now, they have forgotten all about the real God. They were worshipping the thing He created rather than the Creator. When will they ever learn?

This is exactly the way people are today. People have a tendency to worship the things they can see with their eyes instead of the One True God. We must worship the Creator and not His creation.

Psalm 106 Questions

1. How long does God's mercy endure?

2. As the author studies the Bible, what is amazing in it?
3. In verse 1, David is taking time out to encourage us to do what?
4. Blessed are they that keep _____.
5. What is one of the most wonderful rewards in reading Exodus?
6. Visit me with thy salvation is prophetic of what?
7. In verse 5, what is the penman reminding them of?
8. All have _____ and come short of the _____ of God.
9. Jesus took our sin and gave us His _____.
10. When was the first real test of the faith of the Israelites?
11. What should they have remembered?
12. He saved them for His _____.
13. What would cause all the people around to fear God?
14. What does verse 9 tell us of the power of God?
15. What happened to Pharaoh's men and chariots at the Red Sea?
16. What happened to the Israelites at the Red Sea?
17. After the Israelites were saved at the Red Sea, what did they do?
18. What did God call these people who were constant complainers?
19. Why were they lean in their soul?
20. What feelings did the people have toward Moses and Aaron?
21. A great deal of _____ goes along with being chosen of God.
22. What happened to Dathan?
23. Who was killed in the fire that killed the wicked?
24. What did the people make to worship, while Moses was on the mountain with God?
25. Who actually formed it?
26. What lesson can we learn from this?