

Psalm 85

To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

Psalm 85: From the petition of verses 4-7 we learn that the occasion of this psalm was a time of national humiliation. Details are lacking but the people ask for God's anger to cease, for national revival, and for a new display of His mercy. The petition is preceded by a remembrance of the Lord's past favors (verses 1-3), and succeeded by a statement of the psalmist's certainty of impending deliverance (verses 8-13).

Verses 1-13: The psalmist pledges that God will again demonstrate His covenant love to Israel. God has been merciful in the past; He is angry presently; but He will restore Israel in the future (compare Deut. Chapter 30; Hosea 3:4-5). Though God judges, He is faithful to His promises. The feelings expressed in this psalm may describe those of the Jews returning from exile in Babylon. Though they were grateful for restoration to their land, they were disappointed that the conditions did not measure up to the glory of the pre-Exilic life there (compare Ezra 3:12-13).

- I. Review of God's Past Mercies (85:1-3).
- II. Recognition of God's Present Anger (85:4-7).
- III. Revelation of God's Future Salvation (85:8-13).

Title: "Sons of Korah" (see note on Psalm 84: Title).

Verses 1-7: The sense of present afflictions should not do away the remembrance of former mercies. The favor of God is the fountain of happiness to nations, as well as to particular persons. When God forgives sin, he covers it; and when he covers the sin of his people, he covers it all. See what the pardon of sin is. In compassion to us, when Christ our Intercessor has stood before thee, thou hast turned away thine anger. When we are reconciled to God, then, and not till then, we may expect the comfort of his being reconciled to us. He shows mercy to those to whom he grants salvation; for salvation is of mere mercy. The Lord's people may expect sharp and tedious afflictions when they commit sin.

Verses 1-3: The six verbs, "been favorable, brought back, hast forgiven, covered, taken away, turned [thyself] from", highlight God's redemptive work in Israel's history. God's gracious dealings with Israel in the past justify the hope that He will again show grace and forgiveness (85:4-7).

Psalm 85:1 "LORD, thou hast been favorable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob."

The land of Canaan, which the Lord chose for the people of Israel, and put them into the possession of it; and where he himself chose to dwell, and had a sanctuary built for him. And therefore, though the whole earth is his, yet this was his land and inheritance in a peculiar manner, as it is called (Jer. 16:18). The inhabitants of it are meant, to whom the Lord was favorable. Or whom he graciously accepted, and was well pleased with and delighted in, as

appears by his choosing them above all people to be his people. By bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, by leading them through the Red sea and wilderness, by feeding and protecting them there; and by bringing them into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, and settling them in it. And by many temporal blessings, and also spiritual ones, as his word and ordinances. But especially by sending his own Son, the Messiah and Savior, unto them; and which perhaps is what is here principally intended.

"Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob": Or, "the captives" of Jacob. In a temporal sense, both out of Egypt, and out of Babylon; and in a spiritual sense from sin, Satan, and the law. The special people of God often go by the name of Jacob, and these are captives to the above mentioned. And redemption by Christ is a deliverance of them from their captivity, or a bringing of it back, for he has led captivity captive. And in consequence of this they are put into a state of freedom, liberty is proclaimed to these captives, and they are delivered, and all as the fruit and effect of divine favor.

There are many different opinions about the time this happened, and just as many ideas about who the penman was. Since this is the case, could we not think of this as a Psalm for all ages? I look back over the wonderful blessings that the United States has had. We possibly, as no other country in the world, could actually live within our borders. We have been blessed with a land that produces more food than we can use. There has been prosperity for everyone. There has not been a major war fought on this soil since the Civil war, over a hundred years ago. We are blessed far beyond what we deserve. I believe the prosperity and all of the blessings that this land has experienced is because, the blessings of God has been upon us. We must take a close look at our nation now, because it appears that we are out of fellowship with God. Our land is filled with crime of every type. There seem to be no answers to these major problems. We are at the end of our rope. The real reason for our problems I believe, is that God's blessings have been removed. We are out of fellowship with God. The Israelites would get into a mess just about like the one we have today, and they would repent and pray to God for His blessings to be returned. Perhaps, we should heed the following Scripture.

2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

God will bring our land back to its former greatness, if we will turn back and worship Him. We must also look at this from the standpoint of the natural Israelite. Perhaps, the reason the word Jacob was used here, is that Jacob represented all 12 tribes of Israel. Truly there was a returning to the land in the time this Psalm was written, and even today there is a returning to the holy land. LORD is Jehovah. This was the same God that had Moses to lead the children out of bondage to the holy land of promise. When God's people have been in terrible situations, there has always been a (Moses), to lead them out of sin and the world to the Promised Land.

Psalm 85:2 "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah."

Took it from them, and laid it on Christ, who has borne it, and took it away, so as it shall never return more to their destruction. And by the application of his blood it is taken away from their

own consciences; for this denotes the manifestation and discovery of forgiveness to themselves. It is a branch of redemption, and is in consequence of it; and is a fruit of the free favor and good will of God through Christ. And it only belongs to the Lord's special people. The people he has taken into covenant with him, and for whose iniquity Christ was stricken.

“Thou hast covered all their sin”: This is but another phrase for forgiveness (see Psalm 32:1). And this is done by the blood and righteousness, and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. The antitypical mercy seat, the covering of the law and its transgressions, and the people of God from its curse and condemnation. Whose sins are so covered by Christ, as not to be seen by the eye of avenging justice, even all of them, not one remains uncovered.

What has their sin been covered with? The blood of the Lamb. It is amazing to me how many times God forgave these Israelites. On day of atonement, the blood of the lamb was carried into the very presence of God to cover the sins of the people. Christians, your sins are not covered, they are done away with. The precious blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ), washed you in His blood and made you white as snow. In exchange for our sin, He clothed us in His righteousness. Selah, is a good word here. It is time to pause and think on this.

Psalm 85:3 "Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned [thyself] from the fierceness of thine anger."

Or "gathered" it. Sin occasions wrath, and the people of God are as deserving of it as others. But the Lord has gathered it up, and poured it forth upon his Son. And their surety; hence nothing of this kind shall ever fall upon them, either here or hereafter; and it is taken away from them, so as to have no sense, apprehension, or conscience of it. Which before the law had wrought in them, when pardon is applied unto them, which is what is here meant (see Isa. 12:1).

"Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger": The anger of God is very fierce against sin and sinners, by the death of his Son. Or he is pacified towards them for all that they have done, for the sake of his righteousness and sacrifice. And which appears to them when he manifests his love and pardoning grace to their souls (see Ezek. 16:63). “Fierceness of thine anger”: See note on (Psalm 56:7).

The wonderful thing about God is that He is longsuffering. Many times when we deserve to be punished severely, the Lord will give us another chance. It was no different with these Israelites, except it seemed they sinned more often. You would think with the presence of God with them, they would not have sinned. When you come to think of it, we are in His presence too. When God forgives, His wrath is gone also.

Psalm 85:4 "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease."

Who appointed it in his purposes, contrived it in council, secured it in covenant, and sent his Son to effect it. The prayer to him is for converting grace, either at first, for first conversion is his work, and his only. Or after backslidings, for he it is that restores the souls of his people. And perhaps it is a prayer of the Jews, for their conversion in the latter day. When sensible of sin, and seeking after the Messiah they have rejected, when the Lord will turn them to himself, and turn away iniquity from them, and they shall be saved (Hosea 3:5).

"And cause thine anger towards us to cease": The manifest tokens of which are now upon them, being scattered up and down in the world, and made a proverb, a taunt, and a jeer. But will be removed, and cease, when they shall be converted.

This is saying, we have made such a mess of our life. God you make us different. Who is the God of salvation? Jesus Christ.

Psalm 85:5 "Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?"

God is angry with the wicked every day, their life being a continued series of sin, without repentance for it, or confession of it. And he will be so for ever, of which they will have a constant sense and feeling. And is the worm that never dies, and the fire that is inextinguishable. But he does not retain his anger for ever with his own people. Though he is displeased with them, and chastises them for their sins, his anger endures but for a moment. He is pacified towards them and turns away his anger from them, by discovering his pardoning love, and withdrawing his afflicting hand.

"Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?" Out of his heart, where it is supposed to be conceived. And out of his treasury, where it is thought to be laid up. This has been drawn out to a great length of time upon the Jewish nation. It has been upon them for almost twenty centuries, or ages, and still remains, and will until the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in. But it will not be drawn out to "all" ages or generations; for they shall return to the Lord, and seek him. And he will come to them, and turn away iniquity from them, and so all Israel shall be saved.

Sometimes when we have sinned, it seems like forever before we are comforted that all is well. This really is a silly question. The penman knows that God is a forgiving God. He has forgiven them over and over already. Sin remains, until it is forgiven. After it is forgiven, God will remember it no more.

Psalm 85:6 "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?"

Their return from the Babylonish captivity was a reviving of them in their bondage (Ezra 9:8). And the conversion of them in the latter day will be a reviving them again, be as life from the dead. They are like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, or like the dead in the graves; and their being turned to the Lord will be a resurrection, or quickening of them, as every instance of conversion is (see Rom. 11:15). Men are dead in trespasses and sins, and they are quickened by the Spirit and grace of God, so that they revive, and live a life of sanctification. They are dead in law, and find themselves to be so, when spiritually enlightened. When the Spirit of God works faith in them, to look to and live upon the righteousness of Christ for justification. And who are revived again, and are made cheerful and comfortable by the same Spirit. All which may be here intended.

"That thy people may rejoice in thee": It was a time of rejoicing in the Lord, when the Jews were returned from their captivity in Babylon. But their future conversion will be matter of greater joy, both to themselves and to the Gentiles. Everlasting joy will be upon their heads, and in their hearts, when they shall return to Zion (Psalm 14:7). And so is the conversion of every sinner joyful to himself and to others. Such rejoice in Christ, in his person, blood, and righteousness.

And every view of him afterwards, as it is a reviving time, it fills with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. The Targum is, "and thy people shall rejoice in thy Word;" Christ, the essential Word.

Many of the old hymns speak of a request for God to revive us again. Rejoicing comes when there is a knowing that all is well with my soul.

Psalm 85:7 "Show us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation."

"Mercy" literally means "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love". It is a powerful word used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe God's unconditional love and His covenant commitment (Exodus 20:5-6). There is great comfort in knowing that when a person sins, God does not change; His steadfast love allows everyone to seek further grace and forgiveness.

This "loyal love" or "unfailing love", specifies God's faithfulness to His people through His covenant relationship.

It is by the mercy of God that any of us are saved. There is no salvation in any, but in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Salvation is available to whosoever will. It is our option to accept or reject, the offer of salvation.

I Timothy 4:10 "For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe."

He offers salvation to all, only those who believe receive salvation.

Verses 8-13: Sooner or later, God will speak peace to his people. If he does not command outward peace, yet he will suggest inward peace; speaking to their hearts by his Spirit. Peace is spoken only to those who turn from sin. All sin is folly, especially backsliding; it is the greatest folly to return to sin. Surely God's salvation is nigh, whatever our difficulties and distresses are. Also, his honor is secured, that glory may dwell in our land. And the truth of the promises is shown by the Divine mercy in sending the Redeemer. The Divine justice is now satisfied by the great atonement. Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, sprang out of the earth when he took our nature upon him, and Divine justice looked upon him well pleased and satisfied. For his sake all good things, especially his Holy Spirit, are given to those who ask him. Through Christ, the pardoned sinner becomes fruitful in good works, and by looking to and trusting in the Savior's righteousness, finds his feet set in the way of his steps. Righteousness is a sure guide, both in meeting God, and in following him.

Psalm 85:8 "I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly."

"Peace": Ultimately this comes in the Messiah's kingdom (compare Matt. 10:34; Luke 2:14).

I have said several times in these lessons that, God is still speaking to His people even today, but some of us are not listening. Prayer is a two-way conversation. We should be careful to be still and let God speak to our heart. God brings salvation and salvation brings peace. Notice, the warning not to go back to the sinful ways. Hebrews chapter 6 tells exactly what we can expect, if we go back into our sinful ways.

Psalm 85:9 "Surely his salvation [is] nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."

“Salvation ... that fear him”: Only those who renounce their sinful autonomy and put their complete trust in the living God will participate in the blessings of salvation and the future kingdom (compare John 3:3-5).

“Glory may dwell in our land”: The departure of the glory of God, which signified His presence, is described (in Ezek. Chapters 10-11). He withdrew His glory because of the apostasy of the nation immediately preceding the Babylonian Exile (compare Ezek. chapters 8-11). The return of the glory of the Lord in the future millennial temple is foretold (in Ezek. 43:1-4; compare Psalms 26:8; 63:2; Isa. 40:3-5; 60:1-3; 62:1-5; see note on Lev. 9:23).

Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. This fear has to do with holding God in high esteem. When we acknowledge the fact of the holiness of God, it is easier to come to salvation. Possibly, the most reassuring thing to know is that when we repent and accept Jesus as our Savior, we have established our eternal home in heaven. Heaven is the Christian's Promised Land.

Psalm 85:10 "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed [each other]."

“Mercy ... truth ... righteousness ... peace”: These 4 spiritual qualities characterizing the atmosphere of the future kingdom of Christ, will relate to each other in perfect harmony and will saturate kingdom life (compare verses 10, 13).

Mercy is a gift from God.

Romans 9:16 "So then [it is] not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."

James 3:17 "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, [and] easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Mercy and truth are both in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (right standing with God), and peace are the gifts the believer receives by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 85:11 "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

Either the Gospel, the word of truth, which sprung up at once in the land of Judea, as if it came out of the earth. And from Zion and Jerusalem it came forth into the Gentile world. Or else the truth of grace God desires in the inward parts. And which springs up in such who are like

cultivated earth, or good ground, being made so by the Spirit and grace of God. Particularly the grace of "faith"; by which some render the word here, which springs up in the heart. And, with it, man believes to righteousness. Or rather Christ himself, "who is the way, the truth, and the life". Who, though he is the Lord from heaven, yet may be said, with respect to his incarnation, to spring out of the earth, he taking flesh of the virgin. Hence his human nature is said to be "curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth"; and "that new thing created in the earth" (Psalm 139:15).

"And righteousness shall look down from heaven": The justice of God, or the righteous God, shall look down from heaven on Christ. The truth, in our nature on earth, with pleasure beholding his obedience, sufferings and death, sacrifice and righteousness. Being well pleased with him, and with all he did and suffered, and with all his people, considered in him. These upright and righteous ones his countenance beholds with delight, as they are clothed with Christ's righteousness. They are washed in his blood, and their sins expiated by his sacrifice. And as they are hoping in his mercy, and trusting in his Son.

The Truth that is in the world is the spoken and written Word of God. Righteousness is bestowed upon every person who has faith in Jesus. We do not buy righteousness, neither do we earn it, it comes as a gift to us from heaven. It belongs to Jesus, but He shared it with us.

Psalm 85:12 "Yea, the LORD shall give [that which is] good; and our land shall yield her increase."

"Our land ... yield": Increase in the fertility and productivity of the land will also characterize the future kingdom of Christ (compare Isa. 4:2; 30:23-26; 32:15; Jer. 31:12, Ezek. 36:8-11; Amos 9:13-15; Zech. 8:11-12).

God controls the rain, and the sunshine, and even the soil that grows the plant. When we are in right standing with God, God sends the needed things to make a bumper crop. Jesus removed the curse that was spoken upon the earth. When we give to God as we should, God takes care of all of our needs.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Psalm 85:13 "Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set [us] in the way of his steps."

The incarnate Savior, the increase of our land, and fruit of the virgin's womb. And righteousness may be put for a righteous person, as Aben Ezra interprets it. And may design John the Baptist, a holy and just man (Mark 6:20). Who was the forerunner and harbinger of Christ, went before him, and prepared the way for him (Luke 1:76).

"And shall set us in the way of his steps": The business of John the Baptist being not only to prepare the way of Christ by his doctrine and baptism, but to guide the feet of his people into the way of peace. Or to direct them to believe in Christ, and to be followers of him, the Lamb of God, whithersoever he went. Who has left an example of grace and duty, that we should tread in his steps (Luke 1:79). The Targum renders it, "in the good way"; and such a way John taught men to walk in.

Jesus is Righteousness, and we must walk in His Light to stay in the way.

1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Jesus has blazed the righteous path before us and has lit the way that we might follow without stumbling and falling.

Psalm 85 Questions

1. Since there are so many opinions on who the penman was and what time it was written, could we not assume that it is for _____ _____?
2. What modern country has tasted of many of God's blessings?
3. Why does the author believe the problems of today are so great?
4. God will bring our land back to its former greatness, if we do what?
5. Why was the word Jacob used, instead of Israel in verse 1?
6. What is LORD in verse 1?
7. What has their sin been covered with?
8. Christians, your sins are not covered, but _____ _____.
9. In exchange for our sin, Jesus clothed us in what?
10. The wonderful thing about God is that He is _____.
11. When God forgives, His wrath is _____, also.
12. Who is the God of salvation?
13. Sin remains, until it is _____.
14. What is the message of many old hymns?
15. Who is Jesus Savior of?
16. God brings salvation, and salvation brings _____.
17. Where do we find Scriptures cautioning not to go back into a sinful way of life?
18. What is the beginning of wisdom?

19. What is the Christian's Promised Land?
20. Mercy and truth are both in _____.
21. What are the two gifts, in verse 10, the Christian receives by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
22. What are the two truths in the world today?
23. _____ has blazed the righteous path before us.