



Psalms of Remembrance and Salvation History

Introduction

Remember what God has done. Remember who He is! This is the message of the psalms of remembrance. They tell of the prayers and experiences of an individual or of the people of Israel. They tell of God's great redemptive works, mentioning specific people and historical events. Some of these psalms are quite personal while others may have been used to pass the history of Israel down from generation to generation.

We studied four psalms of remembrance this week.

- I. Remembering God's Wonders of Old - Psalm 77
- II. Remembering God's Faithfulness to His Covenant - Psalm 105
- III. Remembering God's Deliverance of Israel - Psalm 114
- IV. Remembering God's Eternal Goodness - Psalm 136

I. Remembering God's Wonders of Old - Psalm 77

Psalm 77 begins as a lament with the psalmist, Asaph, crying out to God (77:1) in anguish (77:10) because it seemed God had abandoned him and removed His favor from Israel (77:7). In the first nine verses, the words of Asaph's lament are centered around *I* and *me*, which together occur twenty times in the first nine verses. In contrast, God is only mentioned ten times in these verses. However, beginning in verse 10, Asaph begins to *remember the works of the Lord*, and in verses 10-20, *I* and *me* occur only six times and not at all after verse 12. God is mentioned 25 times in the last half of the psalm. When his thoughts were centered on himself, Asaph found no comfort, but the memory of God's great works were a sweet consolation!

A. Asaph's Pain - Psalm 77:1-6

Asaph cried out to God. In his time of trouble, he sought the Lord.

1. Asaph's prayer in the night - 77:1-2

In his distress, Asaph spent the night in prayer. Even though he found no relief for his sorrow, he persisted in reaching out to God.

2. Asaph's memory of better times - 77:3-6

Asaph says that he *remembered God* (77:3), *the days of old* (77:5), and a time when he sang songs in the night (77:6). James Montgomery Boice ([Psalms](#)) notes that these verses show that Asaph's thoughts were actually centered on himself. He was comparing the past to his present, painful situation and feeling sorry for himself. John Calvin ([Calvin's Commentaries](#)) notices, however, that Asaph did not give up, and "In this manner it becomes us to wrestle against despair, in order that our sorrow, although it may seem to be incurable, may not shut our mouths, and keep us from pouring out our prayers before God."

B. Asaph's Questions - Psalm 77:7-9

Asaph expresses his doubts concerning God in a series of rhetorical questions. As James Montgomery Boice ([Psalms](#)) points out, "Even to ask such questions is to answer them. The answer is, 'Of course not.' God does not change. God does not break His promises. His mercies are new every morning."

C. Asaph's Remembrance of Redemption - Psalm 77:10-20

God was not answering Asaph as He had in the past, and in his anguish, Asaph again begins to remember. The difference between this and his earlier remembrances, in verses 3-6, is that this time, instead of centering his thoughts on himself, he focuses on God's attributes and past *works* and *wonders* (77:11,12).

Asaph realizes that God's way is *in the sanctuary* (77:12). (Do you recall our study of Psalm 73, Asaph's wisdom psalm, and what a difference it made when he went into the sanctuary of God?) God's ways are so far beyond ours. He looks at things differently than we do. He is God! Also, Asaph acknowledges that God is *great* (77:13). No one is greater than God. He *does wonders* (77:14). He shows His *strength among the peoples* (77:14). He redeems (77:15). The great example of redemption Asaph remembers is God delivering Israel from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea (Exodus 14) amidst earthquakes (77:16,18), rain (77:17), lightning (77:17, 18), and thunder (77:18).

The last verse of Psalm 77 is a gentle memory of God shepherding His flock through the wilderness by the faithful hand of Moses and Aaron. Asaph is assured

by his remembrance of God's faithfulness and power. God, who never changes, will always deliver His faithful ones as He has in the past!

Has God ever let you down? Then why would you expect Him to do so now?

II. Remembering God's Faithfulness to His Covenant - Psalm 105

In Psalm 105, the unknown psalmist calls God's people to remember His faithfulness in keeping His covenant with Abraham. "A key word in this psalm is *remember*. By remembering how faithful God had been in remembering His promise to their patriarch, the Israelites would remember to praise Him" (Dr. Tom Constable, "Notes on Psalms").

This is probably one of those psalms which Hebrew fathers and mothers taught their children to keep Israel's history alive and to instill in them the pride and responsibility of their covenant relationship with God. Do you enjoy teaching children (either your own or in Sunday school) about God's great works and helping them memorize Scripture? It is vital to pass on great Scriptural truths to the next generation!

A. Israel Called to Remember - Psalm 105:1-6

The psalmist calls on the people of Israel (*seed of Abraham and children of Jacob*, 105:6) to remember the *marvelous works* (105:5) which God had done. The remembrance was to encourage them to *give thanks, call upon His name*, and proclaim to others the great things God had done for them (105:1). Their lives were to be filled with singing psalms to Him and talking of His *wondrous works* (105:2). They were to find glory in His holy name, that is, in His gracious attributes. Their hearts were to seek Him with rejoicing (105:3). Rather than seeking after the things of the world, they were to *Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore* (105:4).

And isn't this exactly what God's people are called to do today? We are to remember God's gracious mercies to us so we may be more thankful, more joyful, and live lives which glorify Him. So when you hear a sermon or a Bible study lecture, don't forget what you have been taught. Share it with others, rejoice in it! Glory in the gracious character of God and talk about it with others. We all need to spend more time remembering the faithfulness and gifts of God.

B. God Has Remembered His Covenant - Psalm 105:7-45

The psalmist calls the people to remember because God has remembered. He remembered His covenant which

with Abraham (105:9) and confirmed with Abraham's son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob (105:9,10). A covenant is a solemn commitment. In this case, it is an *everlasting covenant* (105:6) to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan (105:11).

The remainder of Psalm 105 describes God's covenant care of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (105:12-15), His working through Joseph (105:16-23), His preservation of His people in Egypt (105:24), His mighty works to move them out of Egypt (105:25-38), and His provision for them in the wilderness (105:39-41). In this amazing passage, every single verse emphasizes God's sovereignty in caring for and preserving His people.

1. God's Care of the Patriarchs - 105:12-15

God covenanted with His chosen people when they were *few in number* (105:12). They were an itinerant people, strangers in the nations where they sojourned. God prevented anyone from harming them. He even *reproved kings for their sakes* (105:14). See Genesis 12:17 and 20:3,7 where God sent plagues on Pharaoh's house and threatened Abimelech with death for desiring Abraham's wife, Sarah. These are amazing true stories, that surpass anything on television today!

2. God's Hand on Joseph - 105:16-23

It was God's sovereign plan for Joseph to be sold as a slave and taken to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). God *sent* (105:17) him. Joseph understood this and harbored no bitterness over what his brothers had done or the suffering he endured as a slave and prisoner in Egypt. Joseph's suffering and the famine God *called for* (104:16) were all part of God's plan to exalt Joseph and provide for his father, Jacob, and all his family by moving them to Egypt. As Joseph said to his brothers, *God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt* (Genesis 45:7-8).

3. God's Sovereign Works in Egypt - 105:24-38

In Egypt, God's people grew in number and power -- from a single family into a great nation. God made them stronger than their enemies (105:24). Then God caused the Egyptians to turn against His people (105:25). This was part of His sovereign plan to take Israel out of Egypt and give them *the lands of the Gentiles* (105:44), the land which he had promised to Abraham.

When the Egyptians turned against God's people and began oppressing them, God chose Moses and Aaron

to lead them out amidst signs and wonders (105:27). This demonstrated to Egypt and surrounding nations that the God of Israel is sovereign. It finally moved Pharaoh to let Israel go! The psalmist lists the plagues God sent, all of which showed God's sovereignty over the pagan gods of Egypt. The ten plagues are described in Exodus 7-11. The psalmist lists only nine and gives them in a different order than the Exodus account, but his account is impressive.

The sending of darkness (105:28) showed God's superiority over Ra, Egypt's sun god.

Turning the waters into blood (105:29) defamed the pagan god of the Nile, Osiris. The Egyptians believed that the Nile was his bloodstream. How appropriate for God to turn the Nile to blood!

Overrunning Egypt with frogs (105:30) was a curse because the Egyptians considered frogs to be sacred. They believed that their goddess, Hekt, was embodied in the frog so frogs could not be killed.

The two insect plagues of flies and lice (105:31) were a judgment upon Egypt's god of the earth, Geb.

The rain and flaming fire (105:32-33) were directed against Egypt's gods and goddesses of the sky. God sent a terrible storm. Hail and lightning struck the vegetation and splintered the trees.

The locusts devoured everything that was left in the fields (105:34-35), a judgment upon Egypt's gods of grain and harvest.

The last plague, the destruction of the firstborn (105:36), was the worst of all. Even Pharaoh's son died. At last Pharaoh agreed to let God's people go. The Egyptians were *glad* to see them go (105:38) and sent them out with a great wealth of silver and gold (105:37). God delivered His *chosen ones* (105:34), taking them out of Egypt with joy and gladness (105:43).

4. God's Care of His People in the Wilderness - 105:39-41

God lovingly provided for Israel's every need in the wilderness. *He went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light* (Exodus 13:21). He provided them with food: quail (Exodus 16:13) and manna (Exodus 16:15). He commanded water to flow from desert rocks to quench their thirst (Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11).

5. God Kept His Promise - 105:42-45

God did all these wondrous works because *He remembered His holy promise and Abraham, His servant*

(105:42). God shepherded Israel into the Promised Land. He gave them the land and the fruits of the labors of the pagan peoples who lived there (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). He kept His covenant with Israel so they might respond with gratitude, obedience, and praise.

III. Remembering God's Deliverance of Israel - Psalm 114

In his commentary, *Psalms*, James Montgomery Boice calls Psalm 114 "a little masterpiece." Charles Haddon Spurgeon considered it "sublime" (*The Treasury of David*). It is one of the shortest psalms and its writer is unknown. Yet it presents a powerful message in a powerful way. Just as seas, rivers, mountains, and hills tremble at the presence of the Lord and obey Him, so should the whole earth. That includes you and me! Psalm 114 is one of the six praise songs (Psalms 113-118) known as the Egyptian Hallel. It was traditionally sung during the Feast of Passover.

A. Israel Became God's Kingdom - Psalm 114:1-2

Verse 1 is an example of poetic parallelism (see Lesson 1). *Israel* is synonymous with *the house of Jacob* and the *people of strange language* are the Egyptians. See Psalm 81:5. The psalmist is speaking of the exodus, when God led His people out of Egypt. It was then that Israel became a nation. In delivering His people, God raised up a kingdom for Himself. Israel was both God's sanctuary and God's dominion.

1. Judah became His sanctuary - 114:2

Judah (also called Israel in the second line of this verse) was God's sanctuary, or holy place, from the time of the exodus onward. They were a people set apart by God for intimacy with Him. His presence dwelt among them and led them through the wilderness. When the construction of the tabernacle was complete, it was filled with God's glory (Exodus 40:34-38). Later, when Israel was in the Promised Land and Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory dwelt there (1 Kings 7:6-11).

2. And Israel His dominion - 114:2

Israel was God's dominion because He was their King as well as their God. As a nation ruled directly by God (Exodus 19:5-6), Israel was a true theocracy.

B. All Nature Trembled in the Presence of God - 114:3-6

Verses 3 and 4 are a short summary of Israel's wilderness experience.

1. The response of the sea, river, mountains, and hills - 114:3-4

At the beginning of their journey, the sea ... *fled* (114:3). God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could cross on dry ground (Exodus 14:21-31). At the end of their journey, at the moment the priests carrying the ark stepped into the Jordan River, its waters stopped in midstream and began backing up in a heap, allowing Israel to pass over into the Promised Land on dry ground (Joshua 3:13-16). The *mountains* and *hills* in verse 4 refer to Mount Sinai where God gave the Law to His people. *Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly* (Exodus 19:18). *So terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling"* (Hebrews 12:21).

2. The question put to the sea, river, mountains, and hills - 114:5-6

What ails you? The psalmist puts this question to the four natural resources because each had responded so strongly to the presence of God. Of course, he already knows the answer, and so do we! The questions heighten the impact of the climax of the psalm.

C. Tremble, O Earth, at the Presence of the Lord - Psalm 114:7-8

Verse 7 answers the psalmist's questions and brings the psalm to its highest point. The answer is *the presence of the Lord* (114:7). In fact, all the earth should tremble at His presence! That includes not just the seas, rivers, mountains, and hills, but human beings as well!

The psalmist gives the reason in verse 8 which again refers back to Israel's wilderness wanderings. God brought forth *a pool of water* and *a fountain of waters* from dry rocks. This occurred twice, at Rephidim (Exodus 17:6) and later at Kadesh (Numbers 20:11).

God provided for every need of His people in the wilderness. And so He provides for you and me: the sun, the rain, the fruit of the earth, the air we breathe. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,.....so that we are without excuse* (Romans 1:20). *He did not leave us without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness* (Acts 14:17).

IV. Remembering God's Eternal Goodness - Psalm 136

Psalm 136 is a thanksgiving psalm as well as a psalm of remembrance. It is also a mighty praise song and has

been called the Great Hallel (Great Song of Praise). This inspiring psalm was probably sung by the Israelites at Passover, when they remembered God's saving hand and celebrated their Exodus from Egypt. Because of the construction of the psalm, it was probably sung antiphonally with a leader singing the first line of each verse and the people responding with the second line, *For His mercy endures forever*, which is repeated in each of the twenty-six verses. *Mercy* is the Hebrew word, "hesed," which refers to God's loyal love for His people. It is His "covenant faithfulness to His chosen people whom He loves" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, J. F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors).

Psalm 136 praises God for His *great wonders* (136:4) which He performed for all humankind (verses 5-9) and then for Israel in particular (verses 10-24). God remembers His people (136:23). In this psalm, the psalmist remembers the goodness of God.

A. Call to Give Thanks - Psalm 136:1-4

The psalmist, whose identity is unknown, exhorts us three times to give thanks to God because He is good. Charles Spurgeon has written that God "is good beyond all others; indeed, He alone is good in the highest sense; He is the source of good, the good of all good, the sustainer of good, the perfecter of good, and the rewarder of good" (The Treasury of David). The only place to find true goodness is God! Furthermore, He is *God of gods* and *Lord of lords* (136:2, 3).

The remainder of the psalm is a remembrance and praise of God's goodness as displayed in the great wonders He has done.

B. God's Goodness in Creation - Psalm 136:5-9

These verses express God's wisdom, power, and goodness in creating the world: He made the heavens (136:5 and Genesis 1:1). He designed, formed and established the boundaries of dry land and the oceans (136:6 and Genesis 1:1,2,6,9). He made the sun, moon, and stars and decreed their functions for the earth (136:7-9 and Genesis 1:14-18).

C. God's Goodness in Delivering Israel - Psalm 136:10-22

The psalmist remembers God's care for Israel in bringing them safely out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the land He had promised. By His mighty power, He humbled Egypt with devastating plagues until Pharaoh relented and let His people go (136:10-12 and Exodus 12:29-42). He divided the Red Sea to give Israel safe passage on dry ground, then drowned the pursuing Egyptian army (136:16-21 and Numbers 21:21-35).

D. God's Goodness to All - Psalm 136:23-26

The psalmist now focuses on the present, making his visions personal to his own generation. He says: God *remembered us* (136:23; see also 105:8) and *rescued us* (135:24). The point is that God continues His loving care just as He has in the past. His goodness extends to all people. He *gives food to all flesh* (136:25). So again the psalmist calls the people to give thanks: *Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven* (136:26). *He is good* (136:1) and *His mercy endures forever* (NKJ), *His love endures forever* (NIV), *His steadfast love endures forever* (ESV), *His lovingkindness is everlasting* (NASB).

James Montgomery Boice, in Psalms, closes his commentary on Psalm 136 with the following true story. In the mid-fourth century, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in Egypt, was a controversial figure. He had dedicated his life and ministry to defending the full deity of Jesus Christ testifying before emperors, magistrates, bishops, and theologians. His theological position and zeal created many enemies and he was regarded as a troublemaker by the existing political powers. One night, Athanasius was holding an all-night service in his church in Alexandria. Roman soldiers, with swords drawn, surrounded the church, frightening the people. Athanasius announced that they would sing Psalm 136. The congregation which filled the church responded, resounding the phrase, *His mercy endures forever*, twenty-six times. In the midst of the singing, the soldiers burst through the church doors but were stopped in their tracks by the singing. They stood silently until it was finished and the congregation dispersed. Athanasius disappeared into the shadows and found refuge with friends. Those who were in the congregation that night never forgot that although man is evil, God is good, and *His mercy endures forever!*

Applications

1. On Sunday mornings, when the sermon is over, the last prayer prayed, and the last song sung, when you pick up your Bible and prepare to go home, what is in your mind and on your lips? Are you remembering God and what you have learned, or is your mind immediately on to other thoughts? Do you speak to others of God and His glory or are you on to small talk and idle chatter? What can you do to help you remember God's near presence and His goodness as He deserves? How can you help others to remember?

2. Psalm 136 calls us to *give thanks to the Lord for He is good*. God is good. Jesus said, *No one is good but One, that is God* (Luke 18:19). Are you looking for good somewhere other than God? Where are you looking? Remember that true goodness is found in God alone. Will you seek Him with all your heart and give thanks for His goodness, *For His mercy endures forever?*

3. How are you responding to the precious gift of God's grace in your life? Does the thought of God's grace and mercy, as demonstrated in your life, cause you to tremble? Will you praise and thank Him right now for your own salvation gifts?

