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— November 2005 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-7 Nov	95) Call to worship and to not repeat Israel's past rebellion; 96) Sing praise to God, who is coming to judge the world with righteousness and truth; 97) Rejoicing in God's reign of righteousness and justice	Psalms 95–97
8-14 Nov	98) Sing praise to God for His victory, salvation and coming just rule; 99) Worship the high and holy King; 100) Thanksgiving to God who made us	Psalms 98–100
15-19 Nov	101) Commitment to righteous government; 102) Lamenting prayer in affliction with confidence in the future restoration of God's people	Psalms 101–102
20-24 Nov	103) Praising God's great love and mercy toward His people; 104) Praising God the Creator and Provider	Psalms 103–104
25-26 Nov	105) Praise and thanks for God's past care for and deliverance of His covenant people	Psalms 105
27-28 Nov	106) Praise and thanks for God's past patience with and mercy on rebellious Israel	Psalms 106
29-30 Nov	107) Call for people to thank God for blessing them and delivering them from troubles	Psalms 107

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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

“The Great King Above All Gods” (Psalms 95–97)

November 1-7

As noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 93, **Psalms 95–99** are royal psalms celebrating God as King—perhaps composed for temple worship during the fall festival season. Though these psalms have no attribution in the Hebrew text of the Scriptures, the Greek Septuagint translation titles them “of David.” The New Testament confirms this attribution in the case of Psalm 95, quoting from the psalm (compare verses 7-11; Hebrews 3:7-11) and declaring it the work of the Holy Spirit (verse 7) through David (4:7).

Psalm 95 moves through three aspects of worship: celebration (verses 1-5); humility and reverence (verses 6-7); and obedience (verses 8-11). Beginning with the celebration aspect, David calls for people to praise God with shouts, thanksgiving and joyful singing (verses 1-2). The reasons for praise? God is great and above all gods (verse 3)—meaning above all false idols (see 96:4-5)—for He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, including everything that people have set up as objects of worship (95:4-5; compare 96:5). This is also the reason for obedience. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out that God's role as Creator establishes His kingship. Since God “has made everything, no one may isolate a single aspect of God's creation to be his god. The Lord rules over the seas (93:3-4) and the great mountains (90:1-2). They belong to the Lord by creative fiat. Creation and dominion are hereby established as corollary to each other” (note on 95:3-5).

In light of God being our Maker and our God, we worship and bow down before Him (verse 6). “The Hebrew word translated *worship* means literally ‘to prostrate oneself.’ When *bow down*, *kneel*, and *worship* occur together as in this verse, they amplify each other and call for a reflective, humble approach to God” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-7).

Verse 7 further explains the basis for honoring and obeying God: “We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.” This seems a mixed metaphor, with people in a pasture. Note the unmixed metaphor in Psalm 100:3: “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” However, reversing these is justified on the basis of the whole picture of people under a king as the sheep of a shepherd being a rather common metaphor in the ancient world. “Since kings were commonly called the ‘shepherds’ of their people...their realms could be referred to as their ‘pastures’ (see Jer 25:36; 49:20; 50:45)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 95:7). We live in the “pasture” of the earth, which was formed by God. Moreover, like the earth we ourselves are “of His hand”—made by Him and in His care.

Sheep know and follow the voice of their shepherd (John 10:3-4). Yet the nation of Israel had not done so well as the sheep of God's flock. David urges us to hear the Shepherd's voice (Psalm 95:7b, which tells us to not become stubborn, rebellious and wayward, as ancient Israel had become in the wilderness (verses 8-11). The New King James Version sets verses 8-11 inside quotation marks, as in these verses God is speaking within the words of the psalm, referring to Himself with “Me” and “My.”

Although the Israelites had seen God's wonderful work (verse 9) in delivering them from Egypt by many miracles, they failed to trust Him for their daily needs of food and water.

In verse 8, the NKJV reads, “Do not harden your hearts, as in the day of *rebellion*, as in the day of *trial* in the wilderness” (italics added), while the NIV leaves the two italicized words here untranslated: “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert” (verse 8). At their encampment at Rephidim the people complained against God and Moses because they were thirsty. God gave them water there from a rock, but Moses renamed the site *Meribah*, meaning “strife, quarreling, contention.” The Greek Septuagint and the New Testament translate this word as “rebellion.” *Massah*, meaning “testing,” is another name “given to the place where the Israelites murmured for want of water (Ex.17:7; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8); called also *Meribah*” (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 824, “Massah”).

Yet it was not at this particular rebellion that God declared the older generation of Israelites would not enter His rest, as Psalm 95:11 states. Rather, this came a bit later in Numbers 14 (see verses 28-30). Here the people had refused to progress from their encampment at Kadesh to entering the Promised Land because they feared the giants (the Anakim) there and the fortified cities of the Canaanites (see Deuteronomy 1:28). It was at that time that God “took an oath, saying, ‘Surely not one of these men of

this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give your fathers” (Deuteronomy 1:35). Entry into the Promised Land equated to finding rest (see Exodus 33:14; Deuteronomy 12:10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13, 15). Thus, Meribah and Massah in Psalm 95, while likely *alluding* on one level to the specific episode at the water, was evidently meant more as a general description of the attitude of the Israelites in their wanderings. Indeed, as noted above, in translating this passage into Greek, the book of Hebrews translates these words as well—showing that they are not mainly intended as place names.

The psalmist states that although God continued to care and provide for the people, He was angry with them during the wilderness years. They never developed a heart receptive to Him or His ways (verse 10). Near the end of their 40 years of wandering, God and the people had another face-off over water at Kadesh (also renamed *Meribah*). Moses lost patience with the people and struck the rock twice, bringing on himself and Aaron the severe penalty of being excluded from entering the ancient Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-13; see the Bible Reading Program comments on this passage).

“Rest” in Psalm 95 is “a rich concept indicating Israel’s possession of a place with God in the earth where they are secure from all external threats and internal calamities (see Dt 3:20; 1Ki 5:4...)” (Zondervan, note on Psalm 95:11). The call to not rebel so as to enter God’s rest still applies. This is what Hebrews 3–4 explains, warning Christians against falling into faithless disobedience like ancient Israel (see 3:12-13; 4:11). These New Testament chapters point out that the warning and exhortation of Psalm 95 is given not to those who failed to enter God’s rest in the time of Moses and Joshua, but rather to those long after—in a time David designated as “Today” when he was inspired to compose the psalm (see Hebrews 4:7). The applicable time called “Today” still continues, we are told (verse 8; see also 3:13). Hebrews 4:9 uses the Greek word *sabbatismos*—meaning Sabbath observance (resting from weekly labor), which the ancient Israelites flagrantly violated—to designate the rest God’s people are still to enter today. Moreover, the passage makes clear that this is as a type of the future rest to be experienced in God’s Kingdom—the Promised Land still to come.

To better understand how the weekly Sabbath relates to rest—past, present and future—see the free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.

We earlier read **Psalm 96** in conjunction with 1 Chronicles 16, which concerns David having the Ark of the Covenant brought to its new tabernacle in Jerusalem. The words of Psalm 96, with some alteration, appear as a significant portion of the latter half of the psalm David composed for that occasion (see 1 Chronicles 16:23-33). Portions of Psalms 105 and 106 may also be found in that psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Chronicles 16:4-36; Psalm 105:1-15; 96; 106:1, 47-48).

It appears that the 1 Chronicles 16 psalm was the original composition—later divided into separate psalms, probably for temple worship. Consider that Psalm 96 seems to have been produced through editing the lyrics of 1 Chronicles 16:23-33. Note for instance the following sets of three—sing, sing, sing (verses 1-3), give, give, give (verses 7-9), and let, let, let (verses 11-13). The parallel arrangement in 1 Chronicles 16 has the words sing just once and the word let four times in a row.

It is interesting in this light to consider the first words of Psalm 96, which do not appear in 1 Chronicles 16: “Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!”—the same as Psalm 98:1 (compare also 33:3; 40:3; 144:9; 149:1). The words of Psalm 96 were probably not new when it was arranged but were being used in a new situation. The music was likely somewhat different, given the word changes. But the main point is probably that all worship songs are to be sung as new—as heartfelt communication rather than rote memorization.

We ought to consider this in singing hymns today. We should always find fresh reasons for praising God. As one commentator suggests: “A new experience of God’s blessing, a new truth discovered in the Word, a new beginning after a crisis, a new open door for service—all of these can make an old song new or give us a new song from the Lord” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant—Psalms 90-150: Praising God for His Mighty Works*, note on verses 1-3). The psalm further implies that the new song will be a daily expression of the good news of salvation and God’s glorious works (verses 1-3).

Psalm 96 is paired with Psalm 98 in both theme and arrangement. They begin and end quite similarly—and they both demonstrate an expanding throng of praise: 1) the worshipping congregation of Israel proclaiming God among the nations (96:1-5; 98:1-3); 2) all the nations of the earth joining in worship (96:7-10; 98:4-6); and 3) all creation rejoicing (96:11-13; 98:7-9). As we will see, each of these psalms is followed by a hymn celebrating the Lord’s reign (compare 97:1; 99:1) and its special benefits

for the people of Zion (compare 97:8-12; 99:4-9). “This arrangement suggests that Ps 97 has been linked with 96 and Ps 99 with 98 to form a pair of thematic couplets—introduced by Ps 95” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 96).

Psalm 96:4 tells us that God is to be praised for His greatness and that He is to be feared—held in reverent respect and awe—“above all gods.” The other “gods” people worship are mere idols, but the true God is the Creator of the universe (verse 5)—which includes anything people might decide to worship. This same reasoning was employed in the previous psalm (95:3-5). God is surrounded by majestic honor, strength and splendor in His sanctuary—in context seeming to refer to not merely His physical house on earth but to His heavenly abode (96:6).

The three-fold call *give, give, give* in verses 7-8 (“ascribe” in the NIV), which does occur in 1 Chronicles 16, has a parallel in David’s words of Psalm 29:1-2. The idea is that of rendering God His due. Examples of what to render are also given here in triplet form: offering, worship and proper fear (96:8b-9). Worshipping “in the beauty of holiness” is also found in the parallel verses above.

Where 1 Chronicles 16 has the directive to “say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns’” (verse 31) as the second of its four “let” verses, it is placed *before* the “let” verses in Psalm 96. The pairing of this phrase with the comment on the firm establishment of the world in Psalm 96:10, demonstrating God’s present sovereignty, is also found in the introduction to the royal psalms of this section (see 93:1). This also introduces the future reign of God through Jesus Christ, when “He shall judge the peoples righteously” (96:10).

In verses 11-12, as noted above, the whole creation is personified as rejoicing at the establishment of that future reign (compare Romans 8:18-23). Where 1 Chronicles 16:33 mentions God as coming to judge the earth (administering His righteous rule and justice throughout it), Psalm 96:13 builds more intensity regarding this theme with the repetition of “He is coming” and the addition of the final sentence describing Christ’s coming rule. As already mentioned, a close parallel to the encouraging conclusion in verses 11-13 is found in 98:7-9.

Psalm 97 is another of the royal psalms praising God’s sovereignty. While it follows in theme from Psalm 96, it adds the benefits of God’s rule to the people of Zion (thematically parallel to Psalm 99 following Psalm 98). As with the other psalms of this section, Psalm 97 may have been composed by David, as the Septuagint attributes it.

At the outset, we again encounter the key to the royal psalms in the phrase “the LORD reigns” (verse 1; see 93:1; 96:10; 99:1). The whole earth, even to the farthest isles, can be glad because His omnipotent rule is founded on righteousness and justice (verse 2b; compare 89:14).

The statement “clouds and darkness surround Him” (Psalm 97:2a) pictures the coming judgment of God on rebellious mankind. At that time, Christ will deal with His enemies in a great display of consuming power and global upheaval (verses 3-5), as detailed in many passages (e.g., Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:14-15; Isaiah 2:12, 19; Micah 1:3-4). This will demonstrate His sovereignty as “the Lord of the whole earth” (Psalm 97:5).

Verse 6 says, “The heavens declare His righteousness.” In an ongoing sense, the heavens declare God’s power and majesty (19:1-4) as well as His establishment of cosmic order and stability. Moreover, in a future sense, the ominous signs in the heavens accompanying Christ’s return will demonstrate His intention to bring justice to the earth.

The psalm calls for shame on those who serve idols, whether literal false deities or worthless pursuits that claim their time and attention. Anyone or anything that has been idolized will ultimately be placed in submission to the true God (see Psalm 97:7). As in the previous two psalms, we are told that God is “above all gods” (verse 9; see 95:3; 96:4).

Zion (Jerusalem) in 97:8 (see also 99:2) can refer to the physical city and its inhabitants, who are glad at the message of God’s sovereignty and coming Kingdom. Jerusalem will in fact be the capital of the world during the reign of Christ. The “daughters of Judah” in 97:8 are taken to mean “villages of Judah” in the NIV, showing the rejoicing of Jerusalem and its outlying communities. In a prophetic context, “Zion” can also refer to God’s spiritual people, His Church. So can the “daughters of Judah,” as the spiritual people of God are Jews in a spiritual sense (see Romans 2:25-29).

Until Christ returns, those who love God must continue to reject evil (verse 10; see also Proverbs 8:13). God's people benefit from His protection and enlightenment—He is the foundation of their joy (Psalm 97:11-12).

“Shout Joyfully to the LORD, All the Earth” (Psalms 98–100)

November 8-14

As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 96, that psalm finds a parallel in **Psalm 98**. Both begin with a call for a new song of praise for the Lord (96:1; 98:1). Both progress through widening circles of praise: first the congregation of worship at the temple (96:1-5; 98:1-3); then all people on earth (96:7-10; 98:4-6); and finally all creation (96:11-13; 98:7-9). And the two psalms end with rather similar language (see 96:11-13; 98:7-9).

Another royal psalm of the set spanning 93–99, Psalm 98 also follows this thematic progression: “(1) a call to praise God as the Savior (vv. 1-3); (2) a call to praise God as the King (vv. 4-6); (3) a call to praise God as the coming Judge (vv. 7-9)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 98). As with the other psalms of this section, the Septuagint names David as the author, though this attribution is not confirmed (in fact, only two of the seven, Psalms 95 and 96, have confirmed Davidic authorship).

The end of Psalm 98:1 introduces the psalm as what some call a “Divine Warrior victory song” (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introductory note on Psalm 98). The imagery of God's “right hand”—symbolic of favorable action—gaining victory was earlier used of His powerful deliverance of Israel from Egypt (see Exodus 15:6; compare Deuteronomy 4:34). It was God's “right hand” that afterward delivered the Promised Land into Israel's hands (Psalm 44:3). The reference in Psalm 98 could just as well refer to God leading Israel's armies to victory in David's day or later. It ultimately could also serve as an end-time prophecy of God's future takeover of this world, as explicitly mentioned at the end of the psalm.

Verse 2 explains that “God's saving acts in behalf of his people are also his self-revelation to the nations; in this sense God is his own evangelist (see 77:14...see also Isa 52:10)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 98:2). The end of verse 3 will be ultimately realized at the return of Christ in power and glory at the end of the age (compare Isaiah 40:5; Luke 3:6).

Only then will the psalmist's call for the whole earth to join in a joyous celebration of praise to the Lord, the King, be answered (see verses 4-6). Only then will the whole of creation be liberated from its current bondage to corruption (compare verses 7-8; Romans 8:21).

The psalm ends with the great announcement also made in Psalm 96:13: “He is coming to judge the earth” (98:9)—that is, to rule all nations—and His judgment or rule will be righteous and equitable, meaning fair, reasonable, impartial and just.

Psalm 99 is the last of the set of royal psalms beginning with Psalm 93. It appears to form a couplet with Psalm 98, as Psalm 97 does with 96. Psalms 97 and 99 both open with the same key phrase, “The LORD reigns,” and they both mention the special benefits of this reign to Zion. This can refer to the physical city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants or to God's spiritual people. “Jacob” in 99:4 refers to the physical nation of Israel, wherein God has previously executed just and righteous rule and will do so again in His Kingdom—as a preview of how He will then extend His rule to all nations.

A running theme through Psalm 98 is God's holiness. Note the similar refrain at the end of verses 3, 5 and 9: “He is holy...He is holy...the LORD our God is holy.” As *The Nelson Study Bible* explains: “*Holy* means to be ‘distant’ or ‘distinct from.’ This is the principle word used to describe the transcendence of God (113:4-6)” (note on Psalm 99:3). In line with this, verse 2 states that God is “high above all the peoples.” Another commentator says: “The word ‘holy’ means ‘separate, set apart, totally different.’ God's nature is ‘wholly other,’ yet He was willing to dwell with His people and meet their needs” (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 1-3). Indeed, despite how high above us God is (compare Isaiah 55:8-9), we are also told that “He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

In response to the majesty and power of God's reign, people on earth should *tremble* and *shake* with awe (Psalm 99:1, NIV). God dwelling “between the cherubim” (same verse) may refer to God's exalted throne in heaven—yet the significance here may be that of God coming down to the earthly model of His heavenly throne in the tabernacle or temple. Recall the two golden cherubim fashioned to cover the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-20). During the time of Israel's wilderness years, God met with Moses at the mercy seat: “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony” (Exodus 25:22). This

would seem to parallel the later statement in Psalm 99 regarding God speaking to Moses, Aaron and Samuel “in the cloudy pillar” (verse 7), which came down into the tabernacle, evidently still in Samuel’s day as it later did in Solomon’s temple (see 1 Kings 8:10-11). Even so, when Christ comes in power to rule the nations, He will rule from the earthly temple in Jerusalem and the pillar of cloud and fire will be restored (Isaiah 4:5).

Worshipping at God’s “footstool” in Psalm 99:5 connotes a feeling of humility. From His throne in heaven, God looks on the earth as His footstool (Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:35). Yet more specifically, He refers to the place of His tabernacle or temple as His footstool (Psalm 132:7; Isaiah 60:13)—and that is evidently what is meant here, given the parallel mention of God’s “holy hill” (Psalm 99:9). “When the Israelites came to the temple in Jerusalem to worship, they pictured themselves as being at the feet of the Creator” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 5).

In verse 6, Moses is classed with Aaron as a priest in the sense of an intercessor between God and man. Indeed, all of the spiritually converted people of God are considered to form a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The psalmist remembers that God answered the faithful men of old—Moses, Aaron and Samuel serving as examples of this (there having been many others). Although God punished their sins, He still answered them with forgiveness: “You were to them God-Who-Forgives” (verse 8).

The psalmist infers that, “since God answered the prayers of our ancestors, surely He will continue to answer the prayers of those who call upon Him” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 6). Indeed, He does so today and will do so even more dramatically when His coming reign over the earth is established. All of this again demonstrates that despite God’s high and holy transcendence above our lowly earthly existence, He is intimately concerned with His people and faithfully responds to their worship and prayers.

Psalm 100 is an unattributed psalm of public thanksgiving to God that follows the set of royal psalms from 93 to 99. “Perhaps the ancient editors felt that the royal psalms demanded the response of worship provided by this psalm” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 100). The psalm also closes the entire section of psalms beginning with Psalm 90. Psalm 100 is related to Psalm 95:1-2 and, as we will see, to 95:6-7. And its opening words in 100:1 are the same in Hebrew as the first line of Psalm 98:4, there translated, “Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.”

The full response to this call will later come when Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God on the earth. Under His rule, everyone will experience the gladness (verse 2) of living in harmony with God. At that time singing with joy to the Lord will be natural and spontaneous. In the meantime, worshippers come before Him anticipating the future with joy—in spite of circumstances of the world.

The basis for giving thanks is that God, as our Creator, has made us. We did not make ourselves (verse 3). “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Moreover, God guides us, cares for us and provides for us as a shepherd does his sheep (see Psalm 100:3b). The same basis for praise is laid out in Psalm 95:6-7.

We are commanded to enter into God’s presence and worship Him because He is eternally good, loving and merciful (verses 4-5). The *gates* and *courts* here picture the temple where people come through the gates into the courts to praise God as a congregation. It also symbolizes the fellowship and worship of God’s spiritual temple today, His Church, as well as the great throngs of worship in the coming Kingdom.

A Royal Oath of Office; A Testimony for the Future (Psalms 101–102) November 15-19

As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out, Psalms 101–110 appear to form “a collection of ten psalms located between two other groups (...Ps 90–100; 111–119) and framed by two psalms that pertain to the king (the first, the king’s vow to pattern his reign after God’s righteous rule; the last, God’s commitment to maintain the king—his anointed—and give him victories over all his enemies. This little psalter-within-the-Psalter is concentrically arranged. Inside the frame [of 101 and 110], Ps 102 and 109 are prayers of individuals in times of intense distress; [within these] Ps 103 and 108 praise the Lord for his ‘great...love’ that reaches to the heavens (103:11; 108:4); [within these] Ps 104 and 107 are complements, with 104 celebrating God’s many wise and benevolent acts in creation and 107 celebrating God’s ‘wonderful deeds’ (vv. 8, 15, 21, 24, 31) for people through his lordship over creation; and [finally within these] the remaining two are also complements, with Ps 105 reciting the history of Israel’s

redemption and 106 reciting the same history as a history of Israel's rebellion. This little psalter includes most of the forms and themes found in the rest of the psalter. Its outer frame is devoted to royal psalms and its center pair to recitals of Israel's history with God.... As a collection it bears a distinctly redemption-history stamp and evokes recollection of all the salient elements of the O[ld] T[estament] message" (note on Psalms 101–110).

Given this apparent collection, there is the obvious problem of the book division occurring within it at Psalm 107. Recall, however, from the Bible Reading Program's introduction to Psalms that the division between Books IV and V of the Psalter appears to be an artificial late change—seemingly made primarily to create a fivefold division of the Psalms to correspond with the five books of the Law, likely to have the temple songs follow along with the Scripture reading cycle. We will note more about this matter when we come to Psalm 107 in our reading.

Psalm 101 is a royal psalm of David composed in the form a commitment. As is the case with most psalms, it is not clear whether he originally intended this as a solely personal expression or planned from the beginning for it to be used by others. In any event, when included in the Psalter its words of commitment were certainly to be proclaimed by others—these being successor rulers (as only they had the power to administer justice in the fashion proclaimed in the psalm). Thus, the psalm could have become a sort of oath of office.

David is determined to “behave wisely in a perfect way” or, as the New International Version renders this, to “be careful to lead a blameless life” (verse 2). He begins by praising God, because God's mercy (or lovingkindness) and justice motivate David to rule Israel with the same gracious care and upright fairness.

God had made known His expectations for the kings of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The king was to write his own copy of the law and study it “all the days of his life” so that he would properly fear God, administer God's laws and treat his subjects with respect. David vows that in his “house”—his royal office and administration—he will be scrupulous in matters of justice, love and mercy (Psalm 101:2b). By leading a “blameless” life, David meant that he would live with integrity and integrate his life with God's purpose. He was not implying that he would never sin (though he would of course strive not to).

The question “Oh, when will you come to me?” (verse 2) may refer to David's need for special help from God, or it may relate to the Ark of the Covenant. As one commentator explains regarding this verse: “Once David was established on the throne in Jerusalem, he had a consuming desire to bring the ark of God back to the sanctuary so that God's throne might be near his throne. His question in verse 2, ‘When will you come to me?’ reflects this desire. The ark had been in the house of Abinidab for many years (1 Sam. 6:1-7:2) and then in the house of Obed-Edom after David's aborted attempt to relocate it (2 Sam. 6:1-11)” (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, introductory note on Psalm 101). There was a great lesson in the latter episode. For God's law, which David as king was to read and write his own copy of, clearly states how the ark was to be transported. God does want to “come to” us—but only on His terms.

David states that his administration will be different from how other kings in the region ruled. He says he will set “nothing wicked” or “no vile thing” (NIV)—literally, no thing of Belial (this word connoting utter worthlessness and later used as a name for Satan)—before his eyes. He may be referring to an idol or an evil practice or person—with setting this thing or person before the eyes meaning looking to it or such a person for guidance or affording it or him a place of honor and privilege in his presence. This would not happen in David's reign.

By “the deeds of faithless men” (verse 3, NIV) or “the work of those who fall away” (NKJV), David may be referring to Saul's administration—that he will have no part with that kind of leadership. David had a consuming desire to clean things up when he took office. “When David became king, first in Hebron and then at Jerusalem, he inherited a divided land and a discouraged people whose spiritual life was at low ebb. Asaph described the situation in 78:56-72 and named David as God's answer to Israel's problems. Everything rises and falls with leadership, but many of King Saul's officers were fawning flattering ‘toadies’ who were unable to work with a man like David” (same note).

In support of David's desire for a righteous administration, he states that no one in his employ will lie, practice deceit, slander, or demonstrate a lack of respect for others—rather, going to the heart of good leadership, he will look for the faithful of the land to serve with him (verses 4-7). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: “The king invites only people of integrity to ‘dwell’ with him and to serve in his

presence as appointed courtiers. Only by surrounding himself with the best and most capable men who will advance the interest of God can the king rest assured that the kingdom of God is strengthened” (note on verse 6).

David closes the psalm with a vow that it would be part of his daily routine to rout evil and wickedness from the land, especially in Jerusalem—the standard would be set there in his capital city first (verse 8).

Of course, as a fallible human being, David did not always live up to his intentions. Consider that such a despicable person as his nephew Joab was high in David’s administration for the length of its duration. The commitments of this psalm will be perfectly fulfilled during the administration of David’s descendant Jesus Christ—which will include David himself, then resurrected and perfect, as well as all Christians who remain faithful to Christ, who will then serve as divine kings under Him.

Psalm 102 is a lamenting prayer by an unnamed individual in severe affliction and distress—apparently during a time of *national* distress: “The title...in accordance with vv. 1-11, 23-24...designates the prayer as that of an individual. But vv. 12-22, 28 clearly indicate national involvement in the calamity. It may be that the distress suffered by the individual, while its description suggests physical illness, is the result of his sharing in a national disaster such as the exile—a suggestion supported by references to the restoration of Zion” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 102 title). Indeed, beyond the lament, the psalm also looks forward with hope and faith to the restoration of God’s people—in an ultimate sense at the establishment of His Kingdom—making this a fitting psalm for its placement in Book IV of the Psalter, which points to the time of the coming messianic reign.

The prayer opens with a plea that God would hear the psalmist’s cry and quickly come to his aid (verses 1-2). In these two short verses he makes five requests for God’s attention: hear me; let my cry come to you; don’t hide from me; turn your ear to me; answer me quickly. The situation is simply awful. Life, its delights gone, is ebbing away. In his constant grief and despair the psalmist forgets about and doesn’t feel like eating—leading to malnutrition and emaciation (verses 3-5, 9, 11). He feels forsaken, isolated, alone, vulnerable and unable to sleep—like some lonely bird eking out a tentative existence on its own (verses 6-7). His torment is magnified by the ranting reproach of enemies (verse 8)—perhaps referring to foreigners who have captured him and his countrymen. Where the NKJV says these enemies “swear an oath against me” (same verse), the NIV says that they “use my name as a curse.” That is, “they say, ‘May you become like that one (the one named) is’” (*Zondervan*, note on verse 8).

He sees his circumstance as God’s judgment (verse 10). And, as already noted, it seems that this refers to calamity that God has brought on the whole nation—not just this representative individual.

But things are not left in despondency and hopelessness. For there is confidence in God’s coming deliverance of His people. The ancient restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile is but a small foretaste of what is pictured here in this psalm. For the “set time” spoken of (verse 13) is the day yet future in which all nations and kings will fear God’s name and His glory (verse 15)—when God in the person of Jesus Christ will actually “*appear* in His glory” (verse 16) and all nations and kingdoms will gather to serve Him (verse 22). The building up of Zion (verse 16) refers to the coming restoration of Israel in the Kingdom of God—as well as the building up of spiritual Zion, God’s Church, to serve as the holy and perfect administration of that Kingdom. All God’s people who have suffered during all ages will have their prayers fully answered in an ultimate sense (see verse 17).

This wonderful message, the psalmist declares, would be written down for a future generation—a people yet to be created (verse 18). Given the whole context, and the verse that follows, it appears that this coming generation would also face terrible trials just as the psalmist. But given this good news—the gospel of the Kingdom—they would be able to look forward with hope in the midst of suffering and declare God’s praises (verse 18), just as in this psalm.

In verses 23-24, the psalmist remembers his immediate plight and pleads again with God to intervene and not cut his life off early—contrasting his brief existence with God’s eternal life and perspective. Yet it is in God’s eternal existence (verses 24-27) that there is hope for the future. For come what may, He and His purpose will endure. Because God continues, so would His people continue generation after generation (verse 28). This will allow the great restoration looked for in the psalm. And it will also bring, in God’s set time, the perfect restoration of the psalmist himself and of all who have placed their hope and trust throughout the ages in the Eternal God.

“Forget Not All His Benefits” (Psalms 103–104)**November 20-24**

Psalm 103, attributed in the superscription to David, is a psalm of praise for the wonderful goodness of God directed toward His people. David begins by talking with himself, demanding that his whole being “bless” the Lord (verses 1-2). This is in response to all of God’s wonderful benefits—the blessings He gives us. We cannot of course bless God in kind. A “blessing” from a human being directed to God is a word of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving or an expressed wish to see all of God’s purposes fulfilled, implying cheerful and committed cooperation with Him—submitting oneself fully to His will. Note that the psalm begins and ends with the same formula (verses 1, 22)—as does the next psalm (104:1, 35).

In Psalm 103:3-5, David calls attention to six personal blessings from the Lord: forgiveness, healing, redemption, lovingkindness, satisfaction and renewal. With “you” and “your” in these verses, David was still speaking to himself, but clearly these statements apply to all of God’s people. That is, each of us reading or singing along with the psalm could say the same things to ourselves. A seventh blessing—relief from oppression—is listed in verse 6 as applying to “all” (thus expanding the divine blessings out to others).

At the top of his list, David thanks God that He has the power and desire to forgive the perverse crookedness of our human nature that manifests itself in various iniquities (verse 3a). Next we are told that God “heals all your diseases” (verse 3b)—just as God “forgives all your iniquities” in the previous clause. Some, realizing that godly people sometimes must suffer ongoing infirmity despite repeated prayers (as even the apostle Paul had to), think God healing “all” our diseases here does not mean that He heals every single one. Rather, they interpret these words as meaning merely that all diseases we have *that are healed* are healed by God—that is, whenever we are healed, God is the One who heals us. This is problematic, however, as it would indicate the same meaning for the previous parallel clause—that all iniquities we have *that are forgiven* are forgiven by God (thus meaning that God is the One who does whatever forgiving is done and not all of our sins are necessarily forgiven). Yet the statement about forgiveness seems more clearly to mean that God forgives every one of our sins—which indicates that the healing clause means that God heals every one of our diseases. In fact, as an inspired scriptural proclamation about God’s nature, this would seem to be a divine promise. How then are we to reconcile this with faithful Christians who are not healed?

First we must recognize that there are conditions that must be met for healing—just as there are for forgiveness. Forgiveness requires repentance and faith—and so does divine healing (especially in cases where the sickness or disease is a result of the afflicted person’s sins). But even when these conditions are met, God is not obligated to instantly and immediately remove affliction. Yet Psalm 103:3 would indicate that He *has* obligated Himself to heal the faithful *at some point*. He may choose to instantly intervene and heal—or, for His great and inscrutable purposes, He may decide to delay healing until much later. In fact, He may in some cases choose to delay healing until after a person has died—when, in the ultimate healing, He will return believers to life in the resurrection from the dead. In this, God still proves Himself faithful to the promise of Psalm 103. Indeed, faithful believers brought up in the resurrection will experience perfect wellness and be impervious to illness for eternity to come.

We find a further parallel in the benefit that follows. God “redeems your life from destruction” (verse 4a)—“from the pit” (NIV)—pulling us from dire circumstances and ultimately from the grave. This, of course, does not mean that we won’t suffer adversity or death. David suffered both. God’s own perfect Son, Jesus Christ, suffered intensely and died in His human life at a young age. So, while the promise of Psalm 103:4 is in part for our lives today—as God keeps us from various calamities throughout our lives and lets us endure others before rescuing us—the ultimate fulfillment of the verse will not come until our future resurrection in God’s Kingdom. Even so, in verse 3 God delivers us from physical ailments throughout our lives today, but He will not remove all illness from us for eternity to come until that same resurrection.

The same applies to being crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies (verse 4b). On one level, David may have been speaking to himself of God having literally crowned him as the king of Israel—along with the advantages and privileges that brought. Yet he may also have been thinking of God more generally and figuratively heaping blessings and care upon his head (compare Genesis 49:26). The word for “lovingkindness” in Psalm 103:4 is *hesed*, meaning loyal steadfast love or covenant faithfulness, while tender mercies here refers to deep compassion and parental care (compare verse 13). Being the

objects of God's grace or favor "crowns" His people above all creation. And ultimately, they will be crowned as literal kings to rule in His Kingdom (Revelation 5:10).

That God "satisfies your mouth with good things" (Psalm 103:5) includes more than providing food. "The word translated 'mouth' is a bit of a puzzle since it is usually translated 'ornaments' or 'jewelry,' words that hardly fit this context" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 1-6). The NIV follows the Greek Septuagint translation in rendering the word as "desires" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 5). "Some students interpret the word to mean 'duration' or 'years' (see NASB [compare NRSV]). No matter how old we become, God can satisfy the needs of our lives and the spiritual desires of our hearts" (Wiersbe, note on verses 1-6). To be *renewed like the eagle* (verse 5) pictures having the strength to soar, to keep on (compare Isaiah 40:31). Both elements of Psalm 103:5 will find ultimate fulfillment in the Kingdom of God—as will God's righteous and just intervention for the oppressed of verse 6.

David uses the past national experience of Israel to illustrate God's blessings on His people—particularly His forgiveness, mercy and love. This was explained to Moses and demonstrated to the Israelites in how God dealt with them (verses 7-8, 17-18; compare Exodus 34:6-7). Though the Israelites, as we all do, deserved death for sin, God nevertheless continues to work with His people. His punishments against Israel's constant rebellion were not without end but were intended to help rehabilitate the people, not to justly destroy them (Psalm 103:9-10). God is here praised for His willingness to temper His righteous anger with His vast mercy and care for His people as His little, weak children (verses 11-14). Whereas God's anger is brief—required only during the fleeting physical existence of man—his "mercy" or loyal love is forever and will serve to perpetuate those who honor their commitment to follow Him (verses 15-18).

God's benefits extend to all within His dominion. "And His kingdom rules over all" (verse 19)—so that all creation (in both the spiritual and physical realms) should praise God along with David, as the psalm calls for in the threefold address: "Bless...Bless...Bless..." (verses 20-22a), followed by the final repetition of the psalm's opening line. This also serves to introduce the praise of God for His creation in the next psalm.

Though **Psalm 104**, a meditative hymn of creation, is unattributed in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the Greek Septuagint translation names David as the author. This may have been reasoned on the basis of the psalm's apparent relationship with the previous psalm (103), the Masoretic superscription of which credits David. Note that David in Psalm 103 opens and closes with the exuberant self-exhortation to "Bless the LORD, O my soul!" (verses 1, 22) and that the same opening and closing is found in Psalm 104 (verses 1, 35), making it seem a continuation. There is a thematic relationship as well. Psalm 103 dwelt on God's benefits (verse 2), while Psalm 104 deals with God's provision through creation. Psalm 103 concluded with a call for praise of God issued to "all His works, in all places of His dominion" (verse 22). Psalm 104 then concerns God's works throughout His dominion in creation and "the *fruit* of [His] works" (verse 13). However, none of this is clear proof of Davidic authorship. For just as it would seem that later editors placed these psalms next to each other in the Psalter, it could also be that these editors, rather than David, copied the opening and closing of Psalm 103 over to the beginning and end of 104 to emphasize the continuity here.

In this song the psalmist follows to some degree the days of creation of Genesis 1. He starts out by describing the great God as clothed with honor, majesty and light (verses 1-2)—paralleling God's first recorded command in commencing the creation account, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). God elsewhere declares that He *is* light and completely without darkness (1 John 1:5)—speaking not just of His radiant glory on the physical level but, in spiritual imagery, of His moral perfection.

Corresponding to the second day of Genesis 1, "the second creative act is 'the firmament' or 'the heavens' described here as a [curtain or] 'tent' [NIV] stretched out over the earth (cf. Isa 40:22). As a camper readily pitches his tent somewhere, so God without exertion prepared the earth for habitation" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Psalm 104:2). Genesis 1:6-8 says that the firmament of heaven or the sky divided waters under it from waters above it. This division of upper and lower waters appears to distinguish between water vapor in the atmosphere and liquid waters of the seas and other bodies of water on the earth's surface. The imagery of God laying the beams of His "upper chambers" (or upstairs rooms) in the atmospheric waters (Psalm 104:3; compare verse 13) portrays Him as setting the lowest levels of the heavens, where He dwells, in the air above the earth.

Within this expanse God, in the person of Jesus Christ through whom God created all things (see John 1:1-3, 14; Ephesians 3:9), traveled on “clouds” and “wind” (Psalm 104:3b). These words here may connote more than atmospheric conditions, as God later led Israel in the radiant cloud of His glory and the word for “wind” here is *ruach*, translated “Spirit” in Genesis 1:2: “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Moreover, Psalm 104:4 uses the plural of *ruach* in describing the angelic hosts—“spirits.” God created these spirit beings, brilliant like stars in flaming fire, as His “angels” (meaning *messengers*) and “ministers” (meaning *servants*). Note that both these terms were used to address them in the previous psalm (103:20-21), showing a further tie between these two songs. Note also that Psalm 104:4 is quoted in Hebrews 1:7 to demonstrate the subordination of angels to Jesus Christ and later glorified members of God’s divine family.

Continuing on the second day of Genesis 1, God next focused on the “waters under the heavens” (verse 9), gathering them into one place and uncovering the dry land. This was necessary because the land had earlier been covered by “the face of the deep” (verse 2). The cessation of this flooded condition is described in Psalm 104:5-9. Verse 6 tells us that the earth was “covered...with the deep” and that “the waters stood above the mountains”—though the mountains may have been much lower in elevation at that time, an idea we will consider further in a moment. The flooded condition of the earth was evidently a result of global calamity between the earth’s initial creation and the six days of Genesis 1, which represent a renewal or re-creation of the earth and its life (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Genesis 1).

Psalm 104:7 says that an order from God caused the waters to retreat. As translated in the NKJV and many other versions, verse 8 describes the waters going up over the mountains and flowing back down into the valleys. This translation, however, is unclear. The Revised Standard Version renders the verse this way: “The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which thou didst appoint for them.” This would imply major topographical changes as part of the reason for shifting waters. Many argue against this as a break in context—especially as the “they” in verse 9 for which God has set a boundary to prevent their returning to cover the earth is clearly the waters. However, it is possible that verse 8 is parenthetical and that the “they” in verse 9 refers back to the waters in verses 6-7.

Some see verse 9’s reference to God setting a boundary against global flood (evidently the coastlines of the world) as referring to His covenant after the Flood of Noah’s day (compare Genesis 9:11-15). However, it more naturally refers here to God’s establishments of the coastlines in Genesis 1. Note that Psalm 104:9 does *not* say, “...that they may not *ever* return to cover the earth.” Here the idea was probably “...that they could not return to cover the earth [on their own].” Later, in Genesis 9, God did state that the waters would *never again* destroy the world.

Rather than proceeding immediately to the next day in the Genesis 1 scheme, Psalm 104 next highlights the benefits of the fresh waters of the earth to the various creatures God later formed. Then the psalm moves to the third of the Genesis 1 days (verses 11-13), describing the production of grass and vegetation (Psalm 104:14). And again, before proceeding to the next day, the psalm describes the benefits of these things to later-created man and beast. Likewise, the psalm then moves to the fourth day of Genesis 1:14-19 regarding the appointment of the sun and moon to mark times and seasons—and again explains how these things serve animals and human beings (Psalm 104:19-23). In all this, we observe a connection with Psalm 103 in the recounting of God’s benefits.

The psalmist here pauses for summary and praise: “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (104:24). He then resumes his reflection, proceeding to day five of Genesis 1, highlighting the creation of teeming life in the sea. This is a benefit to human beings plying ships in maritime commerce (verse 26). Leviathan (same verse) may be a literal sea monster—some have suggested a giant crocodile—but is apparently figurative in various passages of human empires or the power behind them, Satan the serpent of Genesis 3 (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Job 41). Whichever is intended, all depend on God for existence—and they will play a role in fulfilling God’s purposes despite themselves.

Psalm 104:27-28 shows that all the creatures mentioned thus far (some formed as late as the sixth day of creation week) are utterly reliant on God for their existence and sustenance. If God does not provide for them and sustain them, they die (verse 29). And God does allow this to happen—sometimes on a large scale, as the calamities of Genesis 1:2 and the Flood of Noah both attest. Yet even in such

circumstances, God's providence continues—for He sends forth His Spirit, creates life once again and renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30). This could refer to the general cycle in which, as flora and fauna die, God provides new life to replace what returns to dust. However, in the context of the rest of this psalm, this verse may be directly referring to the six days of Genesis 1 as a period of renewal and re-creation on a global scale.

Considering the summary of the six days of creation through the psalm, it may be that the theme of the song's conclusion concerns the day intended to memorialize creation—the seventh-day Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3), which also symbolizes the time of God's coming Kingdom (compare Hebrews 3–4). Note in verse 31 the desire for God's glory to endure forever and that God may rejoice in His works (both very much Sabbath themes). The Sabbath teaches us that in observing creation we must view it as subordinate to God Himself. Verse 32 reminds us that God “is so much greater than his creation that with a look or a touch he could undo it” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 32). The Sabbath calls for singing, praises, meditation and glad rejoicing (compare verses 33-34).

The statement “May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more” (verse 35) seems to be a wish rather than a curse on specific sinners. The psalmist envisions a world without the pollution of sin and wickedness. “The psalmist is not vindictive in his prayer against the wicked but longs for a world fully established and maintained by the Lord, without outside interference” (*Expositor's*, note on verse 35). This, too, is a powerful Sabbath theme as we look forward to God's Kingdom.

As previously mentioned, Psalm 104 closes just as it opens (and as 103 opens and closes): “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” There is good reason to believe that the next phrase, “Praise the LORD!,” originally began the next psalm (as we will see in our next reading).

“He Remembers His Covenant Forever” (Psalm 105)

November 25-26

Psalm 105 continues from the past two psalms on the theme of praising and thanking God for His benefits—in this case, for His special care and provision for Israel in fulfillment of His promises. We earlier read Psalm 105 in conjunction with David's bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem—for the first 15 verses of the psalm are taken from the first part of David's song composed for that occasion (1 Chronicles 16:4-36). We more recently read Psalm 96, which is taken from the second part of that psalm in 1 Chronicles. (See the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Chronicles 16:4-36; Psalm 105:1-15; 96:106:1, 47-48 and on Psalm 105:16-45; 1 Chronicles 16:37-43; 2 Samuel 6:20-23.)

Just as the same doxology or praise expression “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” appears at the beginning and end of both Psalms 103 and 104, it seems likely that another doxology, “Praise the LORD!” (Hebrew *Hallelujah*) is found at the beginning and end of Psalms 105 and 106—the last two psalms of Book IV in the Psalter. It appears that the doxology “Praise the LORD!” at the end of Psalm 104 should actually begin Psalm 105—as it does in the Septuagint—prefixed to the statement from 2 Chronicles 16:1: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD!” (Psalm 105:1). Again, observe that the same doxology ends Psalm 105 and that it has been prefixed to the excerpt from 1 Chronicles 16:34 in Psalm 106:1 (and also affixed to the adaptation of 2 Chronicles 16:35-36 in Psalm 106:47-48).

Psalm 105:1-15 follows the source material from David in 1 Chronicles by instructing others to thank God, to seek Him and call on Him and to proclaim His wondrous deeds to others—one important way being through psalms such as this one. Minor changes may be noted from the source material. For instance, Psalm 105:6 refers to the Israelites (“children of Jacob”) as the “seed of Abraham His servant” rather than “seed of Israel His servant” (see 1 Chronicles 16:13)—perhaps to emphasize the covenant with Abraham mentioned a few verses later. Both descriptions are of course true. The progression of patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel) appears in 1 Chronicles 16:16-17 and Psalm 105:9-10. In the entire book of Psalms the name Jacob occurs 34 times while Abraham is mentioned by name in only Psalm 105 (verses 6, 9, 42) and 47:9—and Isaac is recalled by name in Psalm 105:9 only.

In 1 Chronicles 16, David had emphasized the theme of remembering—for the Israelites to remember God's marvelous works and judgments (verse 12) and to remember the covenant He made with the patriarchs to give their descendants the land of Canaan (verses 15-19). The first reference (verse 12) is repeated in Psalm 105 verbatim (verse 5). Yet in the second reference, rather than calling for the audience to “remember His covenant forever” (1 Chronicles 16:15), Psalm 105 says that “*He* remembers His covenant forever” (verse 8). The change here would seem to stress that even if the people don't remember, God does. This further demonstrates, in line with other psalms of this section, God's

benefits—here being His eternal faithfulness. The same theme of remembering is built on later in verse 42, where God’s faithfulness is again demonstrated.

David’s words in 1 Chronicles 16:20-22, repeated in Psalm 105:13-15, are a further reference to the patriarchs. God had promised them the land of Canaan as an inheritance when their households were few in number and they were actually strangers in the land, which was for the most part out of their control (verses 11-12). Though not immediately giving them this homeland, God preserved them from harm in the meantime as they traveled as nomads from nation to nation and kingdom to kingdom (verses 13-14). Regarding his rebuking of kings for their sakes, telling these rulers not to hurt His anointed ones (verse 15)—here synonymous with His prophets (same verse)—note two examples in the life of Abraham (see 12:10-20; 20:1-17). In the latter instance, God told Abimelech (the Philistine king of Gerar) that Abraham was a prophet (verse 7). Other stories in Genesis show that God continued to oversee the lives of Isaac and Jacob, protecting them from those who would have harmed them.

We then move into the latter part of Psalm 105, which was *not* taken from David’s earlier composition in 1 Chronicles 16. The author of this latter section is unknown. It could have been David or, just as easily, anyone else from his time up to that of Ezra more than five centuries later. This section follows on from God’s promise to give the land of Canaan to Israel by telling the story of what led up to their eventual inheritance (verses 16-45).

The psalmist picks up the Genesis account with the story of Joseph, who was sold by his brothers into slavery and ended up the ruler of all Egypt under its pharaoh. While in prison, Joseph, with God’s inspiration, accurately interpreted the divinely induced dreams of the pharaoh’s baker and butler—eventually securing his release. This is evidently what is referred to in Psalm 105:18-19, which the NIV translates as saying that Joseph was imprisoned “till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.” Joseph then interpreted dreams of the pharaoh to mean that a period of plenty would be followed by a period of famine—and the pharaoh appointed Joseph as his vizier or prime minister to oversee the storing up of provisions for the famine.

This eventually served to provide during the time of famine for Joseph’s father Israel or Jacob and the rest of his family—who came down to settle in Egypt. Verse 16 declares the destruction of provision and resultant famine to be the work of God. And verse 17 further declares Joseph being sent as a slave to Egypt to be by God’s design—so as to provide for His people. This is just what Joseph himself acknowledged in assuring His brothers that He would not take vengeance on them: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones” (Genesis 50:20-21).

Note, incidentally, that Egypt is referred to here as the “land of Ham” (Psalms 105:23, 27; 106:22; compare 78:51). Ham was one of the three sons of Noah, and from him sprang Mizraim or the Egyptians (Genesis 10:1, 6). The H in “Ham” was pronounced as a heavily aspirated or “coughed” K—so that the name could be written as Khem (as the Moffatt Translation renders the word in Psalms 105 and 106). Khem (sometimes spelled Chem) was in fact the ancient name for Egypt, written in hieroglyphic script as KM, the name denoting “black” or “hot” (in the sense of “burnt.”). The “black” meaning here is often understood to refer to the darkened fertile soil along the length of the Nile. But the name Khem could just as well derive from the name Ham, which has the same meaning, or be a reference to Ham’s dark-skinned descendants.

Jacob’s family grew and prospered in Egypt until God turned the hearts of the Egyptians “to hate His people...and deal craftily with His servants” (Psalm 105:25). At no time does the psalmist question why this long history of intrigue and reversal was necessary for giving the Promised Land to Abraham’s descendants. He trusts God. The Lord’s performance of spectacular miracles during the Exodus period that comes next in the story flow was critical for Israel’s *remembering* (see Deuteronomy 15:15).

In introducing the Exodus, the psalmist mentions God sending Moses and Aaron to perform signs and wonders (Psalm 105:26-27; compare Exodus 4; 7:8-13). He then follows with a description of the plagues with which God struck Egypt (Psalm 105:26-36; compare Exodus 7:14–12:30). The psalmist begins with the plague of darkness (Psalm 105:28a), which was actually the ninth of the 10 plagues. It may be that he was using this to metaphorically represent all the plagues as a dark time of affliction for Egypt. And this could have been intended as a play on words—the sending of darkness or blackness on the “Black Land” (as “land of Ham” in the previous verse could mean).

The second part of verse 28 has caused much difficulty in interpretation. The NKJV has: “And they did not rebel against His word.” Some take the “they” as “these”—referring to the plagues that follow in the next few verses, meaning that these (in a personified sense) did not veer from accomplishing what God sent them to do. Others take the “they” of verse 28 to be the same “they” of verse 27, that is, Moses and Aaron (verse 26), which would mean they did not go astray from fulfilling the signs God gave them to perform. Others take “they” in verse 28 to refer to the “them” of verse 25, among whom signs were performed—though it is not clear whether this refers to the Israelites or the Egyptians (see verses 24-25). If the Israelites, verse 28 would mean that they did not go against doing what God commanded them at this time—i.e., keeping the Passover, etc.

However, the “they” in verse 28 is usually understood to refer to the Egyptians, as “their” in the next verse clearly refers to them. Yet how did the Egyptians “not rebel against [God’s] word” when they were punished for defying God’s command to release His people? Some Bible versions try to fix this problem by dropping the word “not” before “rebel”—meaning that the Egyptians *did* rebel. However, the Hebrew word for “not”—*lo*—is clearly present here. The NIV and Jewish Publication Society Tanakh more reasonably solve the problem by interpreting the words as a rhetorical question: “...for had they not rebelled against his words?” Another possibility is that the statement here speaks of the end result of all the plagues—that the darkness of the plagues in the previous clause broke the Egyptians so that they no longer rebelled against His order to release His people. Finally, it may be that the statement simply means that at all points the Egyptians did not *withstand* His word (to any effect)—as they *could* not.

The psalm then reiterates the various plagues in generally the same order as the book of Exodus except for switching flies and lice and skipping over the fifth plague of livestock deaths and the sixth plague of boils (and, as already mentioned, for having darkness first as a summary rather than in its actual next-to-last position). The psalm, we must remember, is written as poetry and makes no claim to giving the historical order. The present wording may simply have better fit the musical composition.

Following the description of Egypt’s punishment, we then again see God’s provision and benefits for His people. Psalm 105:37 mentions the Israelites departing enriched with silver and gold. Where the same verse says that there was “none feeble” among them, J.P. Green’s Literal Translation says that “not one was stumbling.” The NIV says “no one faltered” (compare JPS Tanakh). Thus, God took such excellent care of His people that everyone made it. Verse 39 describes His pillar of cloud and fire, which shaded the people from the desert sun during the day and gave them light to see at night. And during their travel through the desert He miraculously fed them with quail, manna and water (verses 40-41)—the word “satisfied” here recalling the listing of God’s benefits in Psalm 103:5.

God performed all of this because (“for”) “He remembered His holy promise” to Abraham (Psalm 105:42). Joyfully and gladly, God gave the land to “His chosen ones,” Abraham’s descendants. They inherited a land already developed by the labor of the Canaanites, so they could immediately enjoy its produce and benefits. Yet all this required a proper heartfelt response of gratitude (as the psalm begins) and the honoring of God through obedience. “He gave them the lands...that they might observe His statutes and keep his laws” (verse 45).

God remembered His covenant and promises and stuck to them—and the people needed to do the same. Moreover, these wonderful laws, as God’s greatest benefits to Israel, gave the people far more freedom than their physical deliverance from Egypt. Far more than land and populace in the land of Canaan, obedience to God’s laws would make them a truly great nation, as God had also promised Abraham (compare Genesis 12:1-3; Deuteronomy 4:6-8). This promise is yet to be completely fulfilled when Israel at last comes to properly understand all this and fully submits to God’s ways in the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 105 makes it clear that God is in charge of history—and guides its outcome for the benefit of His people. As we will see, the next psalm continues the theme of God remembering His people for their great benefit (compare 106:4-5). As we reflect on these psalms, may we all join in our thoughts in the expression that opens and closes them: *Hallelujah* or “Praise the LORD!”

“They Soon Forgot...For Their Sake He Remembered” (Psalm 106)

November 27-28

In the arrangement of the Psalter as it has come down to us, **Psalm 106** is the concluding psalm of Book IV. Yet as explained in the Bible Reading Program’s introductory comments on the Psalms, it appears that Books IV and V originally formed a single collection before a book division was placed here.

Furthermore, as was mentioned in the program's opening comments on Psalm 101, Psalms 101–110 appear to form a collection of hymns. Indeed, Psalms 105, 106 and 107 (now the first psalm of Book V) seem to be very closely related (more on this later). Of course, the location of the book division here, though seemingly artificial, must surely have been very carefully selected. Perhaps this place was chosen so that Book V would flow right on from Book IV in theme and tone, serving to establish the continuity of the psalms.

Recall that Psalms 103 and 104 both begin and end with the same inner exhortation “Bless the LORD, O my soul.” Likewise, as noted in prior comments, it appears that Psalms 105 and 106 both begin and end with a shared doxology or praise expression: *Hallelujah* or, as translated, “Praise the LORD!” (as this expression on the last line of Psalm 104 seems more likely to open 105). Coming immediately after these opening words in Psalm 105 is the call to gratitude: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD!” (verse 1), taken along with a large section that follows (verses 1-15) from David's psalm composed for the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 16 (see verses 7-22). In Psalm 106 we find a parallel to this. Occurring right after *its* opening doxology is another call to thanksgiving taken from a later related line in the very same Davidic composition: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [or steadfast love] endures forever” (compare Psalm 106:1; 1 Chronicles 16:34). The *end* of Psalm 106 was essentially taken from the same song as well, as we will later consider further (compare Psalm 106:47-48; 1 Chronicles 16:35-36). For this reason we earlier read these parts of Psalm 106 (verses 1, 47-48) in conjunction with our reading of 1 Chronicles 16. Observe moreover that Psalm 107 *also* opens with David's words “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [or, again, steadfast love] endures forever.” (This is also powerfully expressed throughout Psalm 136.)

Many consider Psalm 106 to be a companion to 105 in various respects—including both language and theme. Psalm 106 rehearses much of the same national history covered in 105 but with an expanded perspective. Psalm 105 is a song of thanks to God for His faithfulness in remembering His promises and covenant as a benefit for His people. Psalm 106 thanks God for continuing in His faithfulness despite the rebellion of His people—repeatedly leading them to repentance and restoration. On this basis, the psalm is also a prayer to be included among the recipients of this wonderful benefit of God's mercy and deliverance, which is here asked for yet again. Note especially verses 4-5: “Remember me, O LORD, with the favor You have toward Your people. Oh, visit me with Your salvation, that I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance.” Thus, Psalm 106 constitutes a continuation of the presentation of God's benefits to His people begun in Psalm 103—the benefit here being God's wonderful patience.

A strong contrast is drawn throughout the psalm: the sinful rebellion of the people versus the constant faithfulness of God; the people who “*soon forgot* His works” (verse 13), who “*forgot* God their Savior” (verse 21), versus the God who “*for their sake...remembered* His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His mercies” (verse 45). In all the confession of Israel's rebellion throughout the psalm, we must not make the mistake of seeing this as the point of the psalm. As one commentator expresses it: “The purpose of the psalm is not to condemn Israel but to extol the Lord for His longsuffering and mercy toward His people. In order to glorify God, the writer had to place God's mercies against the dark background of Israel's repeated disobedience” (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, introductory note on Psalm 106).

The particular circumstance behind the composition of the psalm is not known except that the psalmist appears to have been scattered with others of God's nation among foreigners (see especially verse 47). For this reason and a statement we will later note in verse 46, many have surmised that the psalm was written during the Babylonian captivity. Furthermore, we can see that the psalmist was familiar with Psalm 105, using it and its source material by David in 1 Chronicles 16 to write Psalm 106. (Some advocate the same author for Psalms 105, 106 and 107.)

The psalmist may have been reflecting on the amazing events described in the previous psalm, “God's wonders in the land of Ham” (105:27), for He notes that the Israelites forgot that God did “wondrous works in the land of Ham” (106:22). Remarkably, God had done these wondrous works for His people despite the fact that they had basically lost faith in Him and persisted in their failure to acknowledge Him even as He rescued them (verse 7).

Interestingly, the great act of God left out of the Exodus account in Psalm 105 is the Red Sea crossing—but this pivotal event is incorporated as a major focus in the expansion of the story in Psalm 106 (verses 7-12, 22). Verse 12 says that this episode finally led the people to then believe God’s words and sing His praise—yet only, as the next verse clarifies, for a very brief period. They did not wait on God, lacking trust and patience (verse 13), and grumbled for water (see verse 14; compare Exodus 15:22-27), for food (see Exodus 16) and more specifically for meat (see Numbers 11:4-15, 31-35). Although God gave the people what they asked for, He allowed them to suffer consequences (Psalm 106:15; compare Numbers 11:33).

Psalm 106:16-18 recalls the rebellion in Numbers 16 of Korah, Dathan, Abiram and other dissenters who envied and opposed the leadership of Moses and Aaron—though Korah is not named here, perhaps for the simple reason of poetic construction. The earlier horrific episode of the golden calf at Horeb or Mount Sinai, the very site of Israel’s covenant with God, is also recalled (Psalm 106:19-20; see Exodus 32). On more than one occasion God would have destroyed the people for their idolatry “had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath” (verse 23). “The metaphor ‘stood in the breach’ derives from military language, signifying the bravery of a soldier who stands in the breach of the wall, willing to give his life in warding off the enemy” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verse 23). Similar imagery occurs in Ezekiel 22:30, where God finds no one to “stand in the gap” before Him on behalf of His people’s land so that he should not destroy it.

The psalm next addresses the Israelites’ fearful refusal to honor God in embracing and entering the Promised Land, which brought on them the penalty of their decades of wandering and death in the wilderness (Psalm 106:24-27; see Numbers 14).

The next two incidents in Psalm 106 happened near the end of Israel’s wilderness years. The episode of worshipping Baal of Peor (verse 28) is found in Numbers 25, which mentions the people’s involvement in Moabite and Midianite sexual rites. Psalm 106 adds the detail that the people “ate sacrifices of the dead” (verse 28b, KJV)—which horribly might mean that they ate the dead as sacrifices, for Baal worshippers practiced cannibalism (the word cannibal deriving from *Kahna-Baal*, meaning “priest of Baal”). The idolatrous debauchery so provoked God that He sent a plague that killed 24,000 people, withdrawing it only when Aaron’s son Phinehas executed an Israelite man and Midianite woman who brazenly attempted to perform their lewd rites at God’s tabernacle. Because of Phinehas’ bold stand for the holiness of God and His people, God promised him an enduring priesthood for his descendants.

The incident at the “waters of strife” (verse 32) or “waters of Meribah” (NIV) occurred earlier (Numbers 20). Moses lost patience with the people and reacted to their rebellious grumbling “so that he spoke rashly with his lips” (verse 33). As a result of his angry outburst, Moses lost the privilege of leading the people into Canaan. This drastically contrasts with Moses’ intercessory role in verse 23. The point seems to be that they wore down even their wonderful intercessor so much that he lost patience with them and stumbled.

When the people finally entered the Promised Land, they “did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them” (verse 34). They instead embraced the lifestyle and customs of the native Canaanites (verse 35). They worshipped their idols, even sacrificing their children to the pagan deities behind them, which were actually demons (verses 36-37; compare Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20). By these works they defiled themselves and polluted the land (verses 38-39). Therefore God’s wrath was so great that He “abhorred His own inheritance” (verse 40). Pathetically, in blending with the gentiles (that is, the other nations), the Israelites were actually submitting to the ways of peoples who hated them. God therefore gave them over wholly to these enemies (verses 41-42).

Yet God’s purpose, even in the midst of His wrath, was not to destroy His people but to bring them to repentance and rescue them. “Many times He delivered them” during the period of the Judges (verse 43), but the people always drifted away from Him (verse 44). Nevertheless, He heard their cry (verse 44), remembered His covenant (verse 45) and relented (same verse). Verse 46 further says that God made His people’s captors to take pity on them. *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says this “makes clear that the author’s recital includes the Babylonian captivity (see 1Ki 8:50; 2Ch 30:9; Ezr 9:9; Jer 42:12). Although there were earlier captivities of Israelite communities, no other captive group was said to have been shown pity” (note on Psalm 106:46). This, of course, assumes past Scripture as the only source of the psalmist’s information.

Finally, as previously noted, verses 47-48 are, as with the opening of the psalm, taken from David's psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 but with some interesting differences. Observe that David in 1 Chronicles 16 tells those who hear his psalm to "say, 'Save us, O God...'" (verse 35). Psalm 106:47 does not say to "say," but rather simply *says*, evidently in response to David's words, "Save us, O LORD our God..." David further said to say, "Gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles..." In David's context of Israel as an independent nation, this would simply have been a prayer for the unity of God's people and help against foreign enemies bent on destroying them. When applying this statement in Psalm 106:47, notice that it has been changed to fit new circumstances: "...And *gather us from among* the Gentiles..." (emphasis added). This implies a time of captivity—again commonly assumed to mean that the psalmist and his people are captives in Babylon.

The last two lines of verse 47 and the first two lines of verse 48 are the same as in 1 Chronicles 16:35-36. Yet observe in 1 Chronicles 16:36 that the second line ends David's psalm. It is followed by this description of what happened following its performance: "And all the people said, 'Amen!' and praised the LORD" (same verse). This is transformed in Psalm 106:48 into a directive as part of the song: "And let all the people say, 'Amen!' Praise the LORD!" Thus verse 47 says what David told the people to say. And verse 48 tells people to say what the people did say in response to David's song. This ending to Psalm 106 very much seems to be an intrinsic part of the psalm rather than an editorial attachment of a doxology and amen as in other book endings within the Psalter—further strengthening the idea that there was initially no book ending here.

"Oh, That Men Would Give Thanks to the LORD" (Psalm 107)

November 29-30

The repeated refrain of Psalm 107, which begins Book V of the Psalter, expresses a desire for people to thank God for His repeated mercy and deliverance in rescuing them from their troubles. With this psalm, Book V in fact opens on much the same note as the previous book closes. Indeed, the first words of Psalm 107 are the same as the first words of Psalm 106—taken from David's psalm in 1 Chronicles 16 (wording further emphasized in Psalm 136).

As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments in its introductory note on Psalm 107: "In its recitational style the psalm is closely related to Ps 104–106, and in its language to Ps 105–106. For that reason it has been seriously proposed that with these last two psalms it forms a trilogy from the same author. Whether or not this is so, its affinity with the preceding psalms strongly suggests that it was associated with them before the insertion of a Book division between Ps 106 and 107 and that it was intended to conclude the little series, Ps 104–107 [or perhaps 103–107 since 103 introduces the theme of God's benefits, including the satisfaction of His people with good (103:5; 107:9)]. Its recital of God's 'wonderful deeds for men' (v. 8)—which climaxes Ps 105–106—balances the recital of his many wise works in creation (see 104:2-26) and his benevolent care over the animal world (see 104:27-30). The editors may have inserted a Book division between Ps 106 and 107 with a view to a fivefold division of the Psalter"—that is, to parallel the Pentateuch in the scriptural reading cycle.

Verses 2-3 mentions the redeemed of God gathered from enemy captivity in foreign lands. A hint as to what captivity is intended is perhaps found in verse 16, which says that God "has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two." Very similar language is found in Isaiah 45:1-2, which describes the fall of Babylon to the Persian emperor Cyrus: "Thus says the LORD says to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you...*I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron*" (Isaiah 45:1-2). Thus Psalm 107:16 points to a fulfillment of this passage. God in fact used Cyrus to issue the first decree allowing the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to Judea.

Verses 4-7 describe the Israelite exiles as having wandered in desolation without enough to eat and drink, with God at last giving them a city to dwell in. This probably refers not to resettlement in Jerusalem (which was not a rescue from severe circumstances) but rather to the Jews eventually settling down in Babylonian communities following their initial deportation. Thus the wording of "go to" rather than "come to" a city (verse 7).

It should be observed that there is also a greater spiritual reality here too—as John the Baptist was later commissioned with words taken from this psalm to show God's people the way out of spiritual

imprisonment (compare verse 10; Luke 1:79), evidently through his message of God's Kingdom and call for repentance.

Among other trials the psalmist alludes to are dangers at sea while conducting maritime commerce (Psalm 107:23-30)—demonstrating that the psalm does not exclusively concern returning exiles. “No problem is too great for God. This psalm imagines the worse calamities a Jew could think of: homelessness and starvation (verses 4-5), imprisonment (10-12), self-inflicted disease (17-18), and—the ultimate—imminent shipwreck (23-27). Since Israel was landlocked, few Jews had experienced turbulent seas, and thus dreaded them. In all these cases, God was able to rescue those who called for his help” (*Zondervan New Student Bible*, note on verse 27). When tempest-tossed sailors are at their wits' end, they cry out to God and He delivers them, bringing them to safe havens (verses 27-30). As Psalm 89:9 states: “He calms the storm, so that its waves are still.”

God is sovereign. In response to wickedness, He can turn fruitful land into barren land (verses 33-34). In showing mercy to the poor and their families, He can turn wilderness into desirable acreage for vineyards, cattle and harvests (verses 35-38). Those who are righteous understand that God punishes wickedness through oppression, affliction and sorrow (verses 33, 39-40) and “sets the poor on high” (verse 41). Wonderfully, as part of God's great benefits, His involvement in man's affairs is ultimately for a great purpose—that “they will understand the lovingkindness [*hesed*, faithful love] of the LORD” (verse 43). That is certainly cause for thanksgiving.

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