

35. Psalms 106-108

Praying Psalm 106 verses 1-7 with Jesus



The opening seven verses are addressed to God. The same is true of the final verse (verse 47). The psalmist admits: **‘Like our ancestors we have sinned; we are guilty; we have acted wickedly’** (verse 5). The bulk of the psalm focuses on the rebellion of the ancestors, but, more importantly, on God’s faithfulness to the love God promised them. The psalmist trusts that God will continue this fidelity (verse 7), and that he will share in the joy this will assuredly bring to GOD’s people (verses 4-5). Apart from the admission of personal sin, we can picture Jesus praying these verses and we can pray them with him.

¹Praise GOD! (Alleluia!)

Give thanks to GOD, who is good.

Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Who can number GOD’s mighty deeds, or sing enough praise?

³Blessed and happy are those who do what is right,
and act with justice at all times.

⁴Remember me, O GOD,
when you demonstrate your love for your people.

Help me when you rescue them,
⁵that I may experience the prosperity
enjoyed by your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice along with your nation,
and that I may greet you, as one of your own, with shouts of joy.

⁶Like our ancestors we have sinned;
we are guilty; we have acted wickedly.

⁷In Egypt our ancestors paid no heed
to your wonderful deeds.

They forgot the abundance of your covenant love,
and at the Red Sea rebelled against the Most High.

The rest of the psalm is not a prayer, but an 'historical survey' of the ways in which the people of Israel persisted in breaking their covenant with GOD in spite of GOD's constancy to them. Archeology has demonstrated that the survey presents, not an accurate detailed history, but the way Israel came to present its origins to itself and to others. We are dealing with legend, not history.

In their *The Bible Unearthed: archeology's new vision of Ancient Israel* (2001), referring to the stories of the patriarchs, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan and the sagas of the reigns of David and Solomon, Finkelstein and Silberman write: "Although these stories may have been based on certain historical kernels, they primarily reflect the ideology and the world-view of the writers [of 7th Century Judah]" (page 23).

Reflecting on Psalm 106 verses 8-46 with Jesus

⁸Yet, true to God's name, God saved them,
to reveal God's mighty power.

⁹God rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up. [see Exodus 14]
The deep was as dry ground.

¹⁰God led the people across,
rescuing them from the enemy's power.

¹¹The waters swallowed their adversaries.
Not one of them survived.

¹²Then our ancestors believed God's word
and sang songs of praise.

¹³But they soon forgot God's deeds.
They lost faith in God's designs. [see Numbers 11]

¹⁴They had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and in the desert put God (בִּיָּהוָה) to the test.

¹⁵God gave them what they wanted,
but sent a wasting disease among them.

¹⁶They were jealous of Moses in the camp,
and of Aaron, GOD's holy one.

¹⁷The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,
burying alive the followers of Abiram. [see Numbers 16]

¹⁸Fire broke out amongst them,
its flame consuming the wicked.

¹⁹They made a calf at Horeb
and worshipped a cast image.

²⁰They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass. [see Exodus 12]

²¹They forgot their God, the God who had saved them

²²by doing great things in Egypt,

and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

²³God determined to destroy them, and would have done so

had not Moses, your chosen one,

stood in the breach before God

to turn back God's wrath. [see Exodus 32]

²⁴They scorned the land of promise,

having no faith in God's promise. [see Numbers 14]

²⁵They grumbled in their tents,

and did not obey the voice of GOD.

²⁶So God swore an oath

to make them fall in the wilderness,

²⁷and would disperse their descendants among the nations,

scattering them over the lands

²⁸They attached themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead. [see Numbers 25]

²⁹They provoked GOD to anger
with the way they were behaving.
and a plague broke out among them.

³⁰Phinehas stood up and interceded,
and the plague was checked.

³¹This has been to his honour ever since.

³²They angered GOD at the waters of Meribah,
and it went ill with Moses on their account;

³³for they made his spirit bitter,
and he spoke rash words. [see Exodus 17 and Numbers 20]

³⁴They failed to destroy the peoples, as the Lord had commanded,
³⁵but intermarried with them and adopted their customs.

Verses 34-35 are dependent on the understanding of the Deuteronomistic school which blamed the failures of Israel on the fact that they did not wipe out the Canaanites. This failure led them to compromise their faith (see Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16-17). Their understanding of God and of God's will is flawed, but in a world that looked upon disasters as God's punishment they had to find a reason for their suffering in sinful behaviour.

³⁶They worshipped their idols,
which became to them a snare.

³⁷They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons.

³⁸shedding innocent blood. [see Deuteronomy 12:31]

They polluted the land with the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.

³⁹Thus they prostituted themselves by their deeds.

⁴⁰Then the anger of GOD
was kindled against the people.

God was disgusted with them,

⁴¹and handed them over to the nations.

⁴²Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were ruled by their foes.

⁴³Again and again God delivered them,
but they were stubborn, and their sins brought them down.

⁴⁴But still God saw their plight
and heard their cry of distress.

⁴⁵Remembering the covenant,
God showed compassion
according to the abundance of GOD's covenant love.

⁴⁶God caused them to be pitied by their captors.

Praying Psalm 106 verse 47 with Jesus

⁴⁷Save us, O GOD, our God.

Gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.

Conclusion to Book 4 of the Psalms

⁴⁸Blessed be GOD, the God of Israel, for ever and ever.

Let all the people say, “Amen.” Praise GOD! (Alleluia).

¹Praise GOD! (Alleluia!)

Give thanks to GOD, who is good.

Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Who can number GOD's mighty deeds,
or sing enough praise?

³Blessed and happy are those who do what is right,
and act with justice at all times.

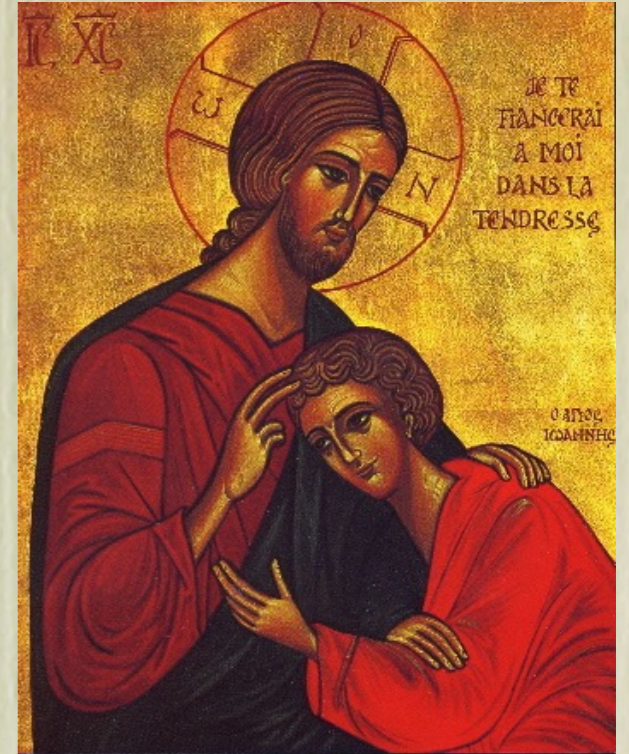
⁴Remember me, O GOD,
when you demonstrate your love for your people.

Help me when you rescue them,

⁵that I may experience the prosperity
enjoyed by your chosen ones,

that I may rejoice along with your nation,

and that I may greet you, as one of your own, with shouts of joy.



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we are guilty; we have acted wickedly.

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to your wonderful deeds.

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and at the Red Sea rebelled against the Most High.

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Gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.

Praying Psalm 107 with Jesus



¹Give thanks to GOD who is good.

Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Let those saved by GOD tell their story:

how they were redeemed from the power of the enemy,

³and gathered in from far-off lands,

from east and west, north and south.

This is a psalm about salvation. The psalmist uses a number of images to describe the situation people find themselves in through their sin. However, in each case, when they cry out to God their cry is heard. God frees them. The psalmist calls for gratitude and concludes: ‘Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and wonder at the marvel of GOD’s covenant love.’

In the first scene (verses 4-9) God delivers those who are dying of hunger and thirst in the desert.

⁴Some wandered in desert wastes,
unable to find a town where they could dwell.

⁵Exhausted from hunger and thirst
they were on the verge of collapsing.

⁶Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,

⁷leading them by a straight way
to a place where they could make a home.

⁸They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.

⁹You, O GOD, satisfy the thirsty,
and see that the hungry have food.

Praying this with Jesus we recall his nourishing the crowd in the wilderness (see Mark 6:30-46). Verse seven pictures God ‘**leading them by a straight way to a place where they could make a home.**’

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: ‘They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them’ (Hebrews 11:16).

Praying this psalm with Jesus we call to mind John the Baptist making the path straight preparing us to find our home in the heart of Jesus.

In the second scene (verses 10-16) God rescues those who are in darkness and gloom because they have rejected God's word.

¹⁰Some sat in darkness and gloom,
prisoners in misery and chains,

¹¹having rebelled against the word of God (בְּנִי),
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

¹²Weighed down by the burden of their misery
they collapsed with no one to help them.

¹³Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,

¹⁴breaking their fetters, and dispersing the gloom.

¹⁵They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.

¹⁶GOD shatters bronze doors
and cuts through iron bars.

We are reminded of the scene where Jesus brings peace to a deranged man (Mark 5:1-20).

We reflect also on the trials that face us, and the effects of sin: 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it' (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

In the third scene (verses 17-22) God delivers those who are facing death. Praying this with Jesus we recall his ministry of healing the sick (Mark 6:53-56; 7:24-37).

¹⁷Some became ill,
struck down because of their sin.

¹⁸They loathed any kind of food,
and drew near to the gates of death.

¹⁹Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,

²⁰speaking a word of healing
which delivered them from death.

²¹They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.

²²Offering a sacrifice of praise.

In the fourth scene (verses 23-32) God delivers those facing death at sea.

²³Merchants sailed the sea in ships, doing trade on the mighty waters.

²⁴They witnessed the deeds of GOD, all the wonders of the deep.

²⁵A storm whipped up the waves.

²⁶They mounted up to heaven, then plunged down to the depths.

Their courage melted away in the calamity.

²⁷They reeled and staggered like drunken men at their wit's end.

²⁸Then they cried out to you, O GOD, and you came to their rescue.

²⁹You stilled the storm and the waves were calmed.

³⁰They rejoiced in the calm, and you brought them to port.

³¹They celebrate your covenant love, O GOD,

all the wonderful things you have done.

³²They thank you, O GOD, when the people assemble.

They give voice to their praise when the elders come together.

The description of the vessel struggling against a storm reminds us of Paul's warning: 'We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming' (Ephesians 4:14).

Praying this scene with Jesus, we recall the scene when the boat he was in appeared to be in danger of sinking. The disciples woke Jesus and 'Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm' (Mark 4:39). We recall another scene: 'The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going' (John 6:18-21).

³³YOU turn rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
^{34a}a fruitful land into a salty waste.

³⁵But YOU also transform a desert with springs of water,
change a parched waste into fertile land,
³⁶giving it to the hungry,
for them to establish a town.

³⁷They sow crops and plant their vines,
and gather in the harvest.

³⁸With YOUR blessing they prosper;
people and cattle flourish.

The lesson of the psalm is expressed in the final verses.

We recall Paul's words: 'If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself' (2 Timothy 2:13).

³⁹If the people fail to prosper,
suffering the effects of oppression,

⁴⁰Their leaders will find themselves
wandering in trackless wastes.

⁴¹But YOU lift up the needy from their distress,
shepherding them like a flock.

⁴²The upright see and rejoice.
Those who do wrong are silenced.

⁴³Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and wonder at the marvel of GOD's covenant love.

¹Give thanks to GOD who is good.

Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Let those saved by GOD tell their story:

how they were redeemed
from the power of the enemy,

³and gathered in from far-off lands,
from east and west, north and south.

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33 YOU turn rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
34a fruitful land into a salty waste.

35 But YOU also transform a desert with springs of water,
change a parched waste into fertile land,
36 giving it to the hungry,
for them to establish a town.

37 They sow crops and plant their vines,
and gather in the harvest.

38 With YOUR blessing they prosper;
people and cattle flourish.

³⁹If the people fail to prosper,
suffering the effects of oppression,

⁴⁰Their leaders will find themselves
wandering in trackless wastes.

⁴¹But YOU lift up the needy from their distress,
shepherding them like a flock.

⁴²The upright see and rejoice.
Those who do wrong are silenced.

⁴³Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and wonder at the marvel of GOD's covenant love.

Praying Psalm 108 verses 1-5 with Jesus [= Psalm 57:7-11]



¹My heart is steadfast, O God (אֱלֹהִים), my heart is steadfast.

I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul!

²Awake, harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

³I will give thanks to you, O GOD, among the peoples.

I will sing praises to you among the nations.

⁴For your covenant love is as high as the heavens;

your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

⁵Rise up, O God (אֱלֹהִים), above the heavens.

Let your glory fill the earth.

Rather than await the dawn, the psalmist wants to hurry it on with his expectant hope that God's faithful covenant love will light up the heavens like the first rays of the rising sun. He realises that it is not God who needs awakening, it is himself ('**Awake my soul**', verse 8). He remains vigilant. Praying with Jesus we think of his resurrection. For us everything will be dispelled by the light of the resurrection. The ultimate dawn is when we share in Jesus' risen life.

‘Let your glory shine on earth’ (verse 5)

Introducing the birth of Jesus, Luke draws on the imagery of this psalm: ‘By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us’ (Luke 1:78). When Jesus is born ‘a multitude of the heavenly host praised God saying: Glory to God in the highest heaven’ (Luke 2:13-14). God’s glory (God’s radiant beauty) is revealed on earth in everything Jesus was, everything he said and everything he did.

In his Second Letter to the Christian communities in Corinth, Paul recalls a scene from the Book of Exodus (34:29-35). The people have worshipped a golden calf. Moses pleads with God to remain present to his people in spite of their sin. God cannot reveal his glory directly to the sinful people for that would mean their destruction. So God reveals God's glory to Moses who will mediate God's presence to the people. The reflected glory on Moses' face authenticates his word as the word of God, but even this reflected glory causes the people to be afraid. So Moses veils his face.

The symbolism of the veil is carried over into the curtain veiling the inner sanctuary of the temple, the holy of holies. God is present among his people, but necessarily veiled. Hence the longing of the people to see the face of God and the promise that one day 'you shall see and be radiant' (Isaiah 60:5). Paul is comparing God's revelation through the ministry of Moses with the new revelation: the revelation of God in Jesus through Paul's ministry.

The ministry entrusted to Moses 'came in glory', as was demonstrated by the transfiguration of Moses' face. The ministry entrusted to Paul came in 'abounding glory', 'greater glory' - as is dramatically portrayed by Paul's disciple Luke in the scene of Jesus' transfiguration (see Luke 9:28-36).

2 Corinthians 4:4-6

‘The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.

For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’

Paul concludes with a beautiful description of the essence of the Christian life enjoyed by all those who welcome the proclamation of the gospel. Christ is the Wisdom of God, ‘a breath of the power of God’, ‘a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty’, ‘a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God’s goodness’ (Wisdom 7:25-26). Christ is the ‘mirror’, the ‘image’ of GOD (see 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6), and when ‘with unveiled faces’ we contemplate Christ, we see there ‘the glory of GOD.’ As Moses was transformed when he went into the presence of God, so are we. For us Christians, however, for ‘all of us’, it is into Christ that we are transformed. It is God’s Spirit who effects this transformation, for it is the Spirit who is ‘the source of your life in Christ Jesus’ (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The redeeming, healing and saving love of God revealed in the heart and on the face of Jesus, invites us to look upon him with faces unveiled. Daring to believe the good news, we contemplate Christ and are bathed in his light. He gives us his Spirit who purifies our hearts. It is God whose glory we contemplate on the face and in the heart of Christ. It is God's Spirit, the Spirit of love that binds Jesus to God, who purifies our hearts, and transforms them into the heart and the mind of Christ. It is in the Christian life of the minister of the new covenant, and in the Christian lives being lived in their own community, that the Corinthians are to see the radiance of God's glory. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, the Messiah' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

¹My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

Psalm 40

I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul!

²Awake, harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

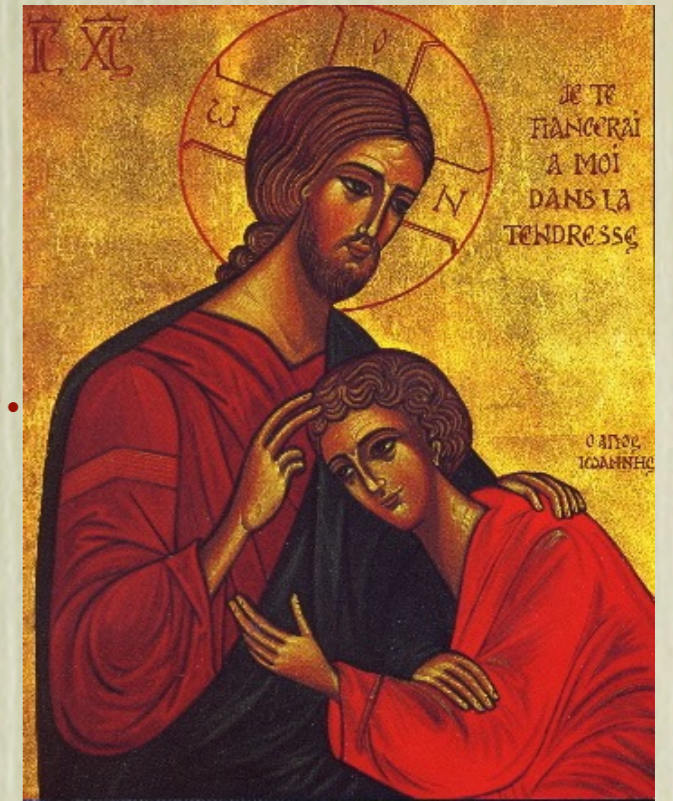
³I will give thanks to you, O GOD, among the peoples.

I will sing praises to you among the nations.

⁴For your covenant love is as high as the heavens;

your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

⁵Rise up, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory fill the earth.



Reflecting on Psalm 108:6-13 with Jesus (= Psalm 60:5-12)

⁶Give victory with your right arm,
so that those whom you love
may be rescued.

⁷God (אֱלֹהִים) has decreed in the sanctuary:

‘I will triumph and divide
the land of Shechem.

I will portion out the Vale of Succoth;

⁸for Gilead is mine, and Manasseh.

Ephraim is my helmet;

Judah is my commander’s staff.

⁹Moab is my washbowl;

on Edom I plant my shoe.

Against me, Philistia,

hurl forth your war cry if you dare!’



¹⁰Who will lead us to Edom to breach the city wall?

¹¹God, will you still hold back? Will you desert our camp?

¹²Grant us help against the foe, for human help is of no avail.

¹³With God we will do valiantly.

It is our God who will crush our foes.

The understanding of God as a Warrior Lord, the thinking that God controls what happens in history, and the attitude the psalmist has to enemies leave this psalm as an historical record, but not as a prayer for Jesus or a disciple.

Where, in verse 6, the psalmist speaks of ‘those whom you love’ we might reflect upon the Church as the especially loved Spouse of Christ, redeemed by his love.