

Psalm 106 “We and Our Fathers: Sin, Judgment, and Salvation” January 21, 2018
Psalm 106
1 Corinthians 10

In Psalm 105, there is no reference to Israel’s rebellion.
Psalm 106 is full of it!

In Psalm 105, the pattern is, “We were in trouble, but the LORD rescued us!”
In Psalm 106, the pattern is, “We rebelled against the LORD, and the LORD punished us,
but then the LORD rescued us anyway!”

In this way, Psalms 105-106 are a lot like Kings and Chronicles.
Samuel and Kings tell the story of David and Solomon warts and all.
But Chronicles leaves out almost all of the “bad stuff.”

Think about your own story.
You could tell your story in terms of your suffering and affliction –
and how God delivered you from all your troubles!
Or you could tell your story in terms of your own sin and rebellion –
and how God disciplined you for it – and yet *still* delivered you!

Both are true.
They just focus on different parts of the story!

So as we sing Psalm 106,
let us consider how *we* are too much like our fathers...

Sing Psalm 106
Read 1 Corinthians 10

The indictment of verses 7-39 is turned into confession by v6
“It is one thing to condemn an earlier generation;
quite another to see oneself mirrored and involved in it.” (Kidner, 412)

It is easy to condemn the antebellum era for their slaveholding.
But do we see ourselves in it?
Nowadays we hear a lot of speakers simply condemning the past.
But they do so in order to justify themselves!

We are the wise – the righteous – the enlightened!

Psalm 106 takes a different path:
“*We and our fathers* have sinned.”

1. Give Thanks to the LORD (v1-3)
Praise the LORD!

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!*
² *Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?*
³ *Blessed are they who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times!*

We often take verse 2 as a hypothetical question.

“Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?”

As if to say – no one can possibly declare *all* his praise!

But the Psalms generally do *not* ask hypothetical questions!

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

The Psalms generally give the answer immediately after asking the question!

So, to the question “who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?”
the *answer is*:

“Blessed are they who observed justice,
the one who does righteousness at all times.”

The ESV blurs over the switch from the plural to the singular at precisely the wrong moment!

The ESV puts the switch at the beginning of verse 4 –
but the Hebrew does this in the middle of verse 3!

Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD?

Those who observe justice.

Who can declare all his praise?

The one who does righteousness at all times!

The connection between the plural and the singular is really important!

The rest of the song is going to focus on how “we and our fathers have sinned.”

The *plural* voice of Israel has not done justice!

There will be two brief references to singular actors in Psalm 106.

Verse 23 speaks of how Moses stood in the breach
and turned God’s destroying wrath away from the camp.

But that singular voice gets muted in verses 32-33,
where even *Moses* spoke rashly with his lips.

He did not do righteousness at all times!

The other singular actor is Phinehas in verses 30-31.

Phinehas stood up and intervened and his action stayed the plague.

“And that was counted to him as righteousness
from generation to generation forever.”

Now, there is nothing in Psalm 106 that says that *Phinehas*

is the one who *does righteousness at all times*.

But the principle is clearly established:

we and our fathers have sinned.

We have *not* done righteousness at all times.

We need *one* (like Moses – like Phinehas) who stands in the gap and intercedes.

We need *one* who does righteousness at all times.

In short, Psalm 106 says that we need Jesus!

2. Remember Me...When You Save Them: The One and the Many (v4-5)

⁴ *Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you save them,*^[a]

⁵ *that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory with your inheritance.*

And so verses 4-5 flesh out something of this connection between the one and the many.

Verse 4 suggests that *this particular worshiper* should be especially called to mind when the LORD shows favor to his people.

It would be easy to read that simply in terms of each singer of the Psalm wants to be included with the rest of God's people!

But we have continued to see throughout Book 4

that there is an echo of the old Davidic singular (from Books 1 and 2) that continues to resonate throughout these songs!

The second line in verse 4 says "*visit me when you save them.*"

That particular word is only used 9 times in the Psalms – and the last time it was used was in Psalm 89:32 –

"Then I will visit their transgression with the rod..." – whose transgression?

The sons of David – "if his children forsake my law..."

Throughout the scriptures, the day of God's visitation is *either* in mercy or in wrath.

In Psalm 89, God visits David's sons in judgment.

In Psalm 106, God visits "me" when you save *your people*.

I'm not going to argue that the human author of Psalm 106 *understood* that the Son of David would suffer the visitation of God's wrath on behalf of Israel (and the nations).

I am going to argue that the *text* (which God inspired!) points *very clearly* to that conclusion!

3. We and Our Fathers (v6)

⁶ *Both we and our fathers have sinned;*

we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.

In one sense, verse 6 belongs with the central body of the Psalm (verses 7-39).

But I want to highlight it because the Psalmist highlights it!

The rest of the Psalm is about how our *fathers* sinned –

it's all in the third person plural –

all the naughty things *they* did.

But verse 6 implicates *us* with *them*.

Last night I gave the toast to the Lassies

at the annual Burns Dinner sponsored by Fiddler's Hearth.

And Ginger gave the reply to the Laddies!

It's a little challenging to give that toast –

given that Robert Burns was a notorious womanizer,

who impregnated at least two women *before* he was married –

and another four *after* he was married (and he was only married for 8 years

since he died at the age of 37).

How do we honor the “immortal memory” of Robert Burns –

when he was such a scoundrel!?

Well, Psalm 106 suggests the way:

“Both we and our fathers have sinned.”

Consider the house of *David*!

Remember that whole episode with “the wife of Uriah”?!

If we look down our noses at “our fathers” – those benighted knaves! –

how are we not *just like them*!?

Oh, we may not be guilty of exactly the *same* sin –

but like deacon Monte McGill likes to say,

“just because my struggle don't look like your struggle,

don't think that I don't struggle!”

If all we do is condemn the past,

then we are doomed to fall under our own condemnation!

For both we and our fathers have sinned!

I listened to a number of Martin Luther King's speeches this week.

It strikes me that he maintained this stance of humility –

a humility that is sadly lacking in most calls for social justice today.

As we listen to the sins of our fathers,

verse 6 demands that we consider *ourselves* –

that we look for the ways in which we have shared in their iniquities –

and thus that we *repent* and cry out to the LORD for mercy!

4. The Sins of Our Fathers (v7-39)

a. Rebellion and Salvation at the Red Sea: the Pattern of Salvation (v7-12)

⁷ *Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.*

⁸ *Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
that he might make known his mighty power.*

⁹ *He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry,
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.*

¹⁰ *So he saved them from the hand of the foe
and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.*

¹¹ *And the waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them was left.*

¹² *Then they believed his words;
they sang his praise.*

Verses 7-12 establishes something of the pattern of sin and salvation.

The only sin in verse 7 is the basic sin of “rebellion” or “forgetting.”
It was simply that they “did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.”

And verses 8-12 focus on salvation.

In spite of their rebellion,
God saved them *for his name's sake*.
He saved them.
He redeemed them.
He delivered them.

Then they believed his words, and they sang his praise.

The pattern of salvation is found in the great deliverance from Egypt –
at the crossing of the Red Sea.

But then each subsequent section of the song
focuses on a particular sin.

These sections do not follow strict chronological order.
(Just like the plagues in Psalm 105 did not follow chronological order).
Rather, they follow a more topical order.

Which one – which ones – are you particularly tempted by?

Verse 13-15 focus on forgetfulness – and the sin of wanton craving.

b. Forgetfulness in the Desert: the Sin of Wanton Craving (v13-15)

¹³ *But they soon forgot his works;*

they did not wait for his counsel.
¹⁴ *But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and put God to the test in the desert;*
¹⁵ *he gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.*

What is meant by “wanton craving”?

Wayward desires.

Inordinate desires.

Deep longings

Not just the ordinary hungers of life –

but the passions that drive you to do things you later regret!

As Paul will say, “Their god is their belly” –

when the appetites control you!

This is why the Christian church has always prized the discipline of fasting.

Do you have the self-control to say ‘no’ to your appetites?

Or do your appetites control you?

Because when your appetites are in control –

then truly “your god is your belly.”

And the warning of verse 15 is for *you*:

“he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.”

And so when our Lord Jesus came in the flesh,

he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.

And in preparation for that temptation, he fasted for 40 days.

Only then was he ready to face down the Tempter!

“Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people!

Visit me when you save them!”

c. Dathan and Abiram: the Sin of Jealousy (v16-18)

¹⁶ *When men in the camp were jealous of Moses*

and Aaron, the holy one of the LORD,

¹⁷ *the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,*

and covered the company of Abiram.

¹⁸ *Fire also broke out in their company;*

the flame burned up the wicked.

Verses 16-18 then deal with jealousy – envy

Are you jealous of others?

Do you covet the gifts that God has given to others?

Note that Aaron is singled out as “the holy one” of the LORD.

As the high priest, Aaron alone could enter the Most Holy Place.

For Dathan and Abiram (in Numbers 16), this was too much.
They were egalitarians!
Aren't all God's people holy?!!

Yes.

All of God's people are holy.

And yet Aaron alone may wear the holy breastplate and enter the Most Holy Place
Indeed, it is precisely *because* Aaron enters the Most Holy Place,
wearing the breastplate on which are the twelve stones,
bearing the names of the twelve tribes –
it is only *because* of this that the people are holy!

(the one and the many keeps coming back throughout the song!)

Do not envy the gifts and the graces that God gives to others!

d. Worshipping the Calf at Horeb: the Sin of Worshipping Images (v19-23)

i. But Moses Stood in the Breach – We Need a Chosen One! (v23)

¹⁹ *They made a calf in Horeb*

and worshiped a metal image.

²⁰ *They exchanged the glory of God^[b]*

for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ *They forgot God, their Savior,*

who had done great things in Egypt,

²² *wondrous works in the land of Ham,*

and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

Verses 19-23 then go back to Exodus 32 –
when Aaron made the golden calf.

Paul quotes from the LXX of this Psalm in Romans 1:23
when he says that “they exchanged the glory of God for images” –
only Paul is referring to the Gentiles!

Here the Psalmist speaks of Israel at Sinai (also called Horeb).

There is *no way* to worship God “through” images.

The only valid image of God is found in human beings –

whom God made to be his image in his creation-temple!

(as we saw in Psalm 104 a couple weeks ago).

To exchange the splendor of God for images

is to forget your God –

to forget his wondrous works – his awesome deeds.

Verse 23 is striking – just like Exodus 32-34!

²³ *Therefore he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.*

Think about that:

He said that he would destroy them.

If Moses had not interceded, then God would have destroyed Israel.

Of course, it is also true that God *called* and *chose* Moses

to *be* the one who would intercede!

That's why Moses is "the chosen one"!

And that's why we need one *greater than Moses* –

because if we and our fathers have sinned,

then we have heaped up our sins before the LORD –

and we need *someone* to stand in the breach – to intercede –

and turn away the wrath of God that is due to sin!

e. Refusal to Enter the Promised Land: the Sin of Having No Faith (v24-27)

²⁴ *Then they despised the pleasant land,
having no faith in his promise.*

²⁵ *They murmured in their tents,
and did not obey the voice of the LORD.*

²⁶ *Therefore he raised his hand and swore to them
that he would make them fall in the wilderness,*

²⁷ *and would make their offspring fall among the nations,
scattering them among the lands.*

Verses 24-27 then remind us of Numbers 14 –
when Israel refused to enter the Promised Land.

This sin is repeatedly identified throughout the scripture as a lack of faith.
"they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise."

And faith is inseparably linked to obedience!

If you believe God, then you will obey his voice!

All sin is – at some level – linked to a lack of faith.

When you sin you are believing a lie.

When you sin, you are *not* believing God!

And in the same way that our fathers fell in the wilderness,
Hebrews 3-4 warns us that the same sort of disobedience –
the same sort of unbelief –
will result in the same sort of judgment!

f. Sacrificing to the Baal of Peor: the Sin of Worshiping Other Gods (v28-31)

i. But Phineas Intervened – We Need a Righteous One! (v30-31)

²⁸ *Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;*
²⁹ *they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.*

Verses 28-29 then remind us of Numbers 25 – Israel’s sin at the Baal of Peor.

This is not just the sin of worshiping God by images –
that was the sin at Horeb – where they tried to worship Yahweh
by means of a golden calf!

This is actually the sin of worshiping *another god*.
Baal – a Canaanite deity.

Verse 28 highlights how they “ate sacrifices offered to the dead” –
probably a reference to some sort of veneration of ancestors –
but possibly also a reference to the Canaanite mythology
of Baal’s battle with the god of death.

But again, God judged the deeds of Israel –
and a plague broke out among them.

And again, our song highlights the importance of individual intervention:

³⁰ *Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,
and the plague was stayed.*
³¹ *And that was counted to him as righteousness
from generation to generation forever.*

The Baal rituals included sexual acts –
and Phinehas “righteous act” was that he killed an Israelite man
who had taken a Midianite woman into his tent.

Numbers 25 tells us that this was why God gave to Phinehas
the right to inherit the high priesthood forever!

We need a mediator who will intervene –
who will establish righteousness and justice forever!

Oh, and by the way, that mediator is *not* Moses:

g. The Waters of Meribah: the Sin of Speaking Rashly (v32-33)

³² *They angered him at the waters of Meribah,
and it went ill with Moses on their account,*
³³ *for they made his spirit bitter,^[c]
and he spoke rashly with his lips.*

Even Moses spoke rashly with his lips

when rather than speak to the rock,
Moses struck the rock with his staff.
So we need a prophet who is *greater* than Moses –
a priest who is greater than Aaron and Phinehas –
and (from Psalm 89) a king who is greater than David.

Verses 34-39 then blend together “all of the above” sins
as it retraces the history of Israel in a few words.

h. Mixing with the Nations: All of the Above (v34-39)

³⁴ *They did not destroy the peoples,
as the LORD commanded them,*
³⁵ *but they mixed with the nations
and learned to do as they did.*
³⁶ *They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.*
³⁷ *They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;*
³⁸ *they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
and the land was polluted with blood.*
³⁹ *Thus they became unclean by their acts,
and played the whore in their deeds.*

Here you find the rest of the ten commandments broken and shattered.

In short, Israel became like the nations around them.

That’s the central point of the book of Judges –
and continues throughout Samuel and Kings –
until it brings us to verses 40-43:

5. Anger and Steadfast Love: Why You Can Trust God to Save You (v40-46)

⁴⁰ *Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people,
and he abhorred his heritage;*
⁴¹ *he gave them into the hand of the nations,
so that those who hated them ruled over them.*
⁴² *Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were brought into subjection under their power.*
⁴³ *Many times he delivered them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes
and were brought low through their iniquity.*

Over and over and over again –

God had mercy and delivered them for his own names sake!
But they were rebellious...

We and our fathers have sinned.

By now you are probably beginning to understand the connection
between God's *anger* and his *steadfast love*.

At first blush it might seem odd that we would cry out to the one who is angry with us!

But why is God angry with Israel?

And no, you cannot say "because they sinned."

That does not explain God's *anger*.

God, after all, is, well, *God*.

Why should he get angry because some little insignificant pipsqueaks disobeyed him?

The only reason why God gets *angry* with Israel is because *he loves them!*

He *wants* to have fellowship with them –

he is faithful to his promises – and he remembers his covenant.

And so his anger exists *only* because of his steadfast love.

(Notice that the reverse is *not* true!

Scripture *regularly* roots God's anger in his love.

Scripture *never* roots God's love in his anger.

Because anger only exists in the context of where sin has interfered with love.)

And even in his anger – he never ceased to love!

Anger is not the absence of love.

Anger (when it is righteous anger)

is the proper expression of love when something is dreadfully wrong!

⁴⁴ *Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.*

⁴⁵ *For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*

⁴⁶ *He caused them to be pitied
by all those who held them captive.*

Even though we and our fathers have sinned –

God never forgot his covenant.

Even though God may send his people into exile –

he never forgets his covenant!

And now Jesus has come –

that singular voice that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel –

or than the intervention of Phinehas – or the intercessions of Moses –

and so you can have confidence

that Jesus will never leave you or forsake you.

His steadfast love endures forever!

And so we cry with the Psalmist:

6. Save Us! (v47-48)

⁴⁷ *Save us, O LORD our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.*

Verse 47 cries out from exile among the nations –

“Save us, O LORD our God”
Salvation belongs to the LORD!

But aren't we already saved?

Well, yes – and no (or better, not yet!).

With respect to my justification, *yes* I have been saved –

“it is by grace you have been saved, by faith!” (Ephesians 2)

But there is another sense in which I am *being* saved –

as Paul will say in Philippians 2 –

‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,
for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.’

And there is yet another sense in which I *will be* saved –

Romans 5:9 says,

“since therefore, we have now been justified by his blood,
much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

So it is entirely appropriate for us to continue to cry out with the Psalmist,

“Save us, O LORD our God!”

After all, “we and our fathers have sinned.”

We need God's saving work to continue to the ends of the earth –
and to the end of the age!

⁴⁸ *Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the LORD!*