



Women's Bible Study
A Godly Response to Life's Realities: A Study in the Psalms
Psalm 106: In History
October 18, 2006
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Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. We are continuing our study of the Psalms and looking at Godly Responses to Life's Realities. This lesson focuses on responses in the History of the Israelites.

I love history; but it hasn't always been that way. You see my mother was a history teacher, now there was a woman who loved history. She not only loved history she wanted others to love it as well. She was the chair of her high school history department and taught most of the Honors History Courses. However, she determined once during a review of the department that too many students, in her opinion, were failing history. She could not understand how that could be and determined that since history was such an interesting topic it had to be the instruction that needed review. So, she went to her principal and requested that every student that had failed U.S. history be assigned to a special class that she would teach. It would be hands on history. She secured her bus license and off she and the students went to explore history in any place within driving distance.

She used the same approach with her children. We too toured every historical site within driving distance. You see to my mother history was not just a list of names, dates, and places; history was a collection of stories about real people and if you listened carefully you could learn from them.

I invite you this morning/evening to consider Psalm 106 in that light. Not as a collection of ancient people, places, dates, and events; but a collection of stories about real people, making real decisions, and the impact of those decisions on their lives, on those around them, and on their nation.

Psalm 106

¹*Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*

²*Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise?*

³*Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.*

⁴*Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them,*

⁵*that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation and join your inheritance in giving praise.*

⁶*We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.*

⁷*When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.*

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

⁹*He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert.*

¹⁰*He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.*

¹¹*The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.*

¹²*Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.*

¹³*But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.*

¹⁴ In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test.
¹⁵ So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.
¹⁶ In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD.
¹⁷ The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan; it buried the company of Abiram.
¹⁸ Fire blazed among their followers; a flame consumed the wicked.
¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal.
²⁰ They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass.
²¹ They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt,
²² miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.
²³ So he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them.
²⁴ Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise.
²⁵ They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.
²⁶ So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would make them fall in the desert,
²⁷ make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands.
²⁸ They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods;
²⁹ they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them. ³⁰ But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked.
³¹ This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.
³² By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them;
³³ for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips.
³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them,
³⁵ but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.
³⁶ They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.
³⁷ They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.
³⁸ They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.
³⁹ They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.
⁴⁰ Therefore the LORD was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance.
⁴¹ He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled over them.
⁴² Their enemies oppressed them and subjected them to their power.
⁴³ Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin.
⁴⁴ But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry;
⁴⁵ for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.
⁴⁶ He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.
⁴⁷ Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.
⁴⁸ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD.

General Information about the Psalm

The Psalm begins and ends with praise. Verse one says, ¹Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. We are to Praise the Lord for two reasons: He is good and His mercy endures forever. These attributes of goodness, mercy, and faithfulness stand in stark contrast to the attributes of His people described in this passage. We have here an abridged history of the Israelites spanning at least 400 years. The brief references in this passage cover incidences recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges.

The Psalmist acknowledges the sins of the people of Israel both in his current generation and in the generations that came before him. ⁶We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly. But he seems to aspire to learn from those sins and to establish a better record of obedience than his ancestors. He also wants to be counted among God's people because he knows God will save them, prosper them, and grant them a glorious

inheritance. Let's look into the stories of three time periods in Israel's history: Flight from Egypt, Wanderings in the Desert, and Occupation of the Promised Land.

These are not flattering years. The people of God are rebellious, discontent, jealous, idol worshippers, and worse. Commentator James Montgomery Boice identifies eight sins¹ during those years that profoundly affected the nation. I really liked his labels so we will use them this morning/evening even though at times we will need a dictionary. We will identify those eight sins, examine the contextual story behind them, and reflect on what they can teach us as people of God.

Time Period #1: The Flight from Egypt

The year was 1446 B.C. It was the night of the first Passover, actually the 10th in a series of plagues occurring over roughly a one-year period. The plagues had nearly destroyed Egypt. But Pharaoh had steadfastly refused to obey God's command to let his people go. He used them as slaves for his massive building projects.

Each of Pharaoh's refusals was answered with a plague. Now it was the night of the 10th plague. Each family was to take a young spotless male lamb, kill it and place the blood on the doorframe of their home. They were then to be ready to leave in haste; this would be their last night of captivity. During the night God would pass over and every home not covered by the blood of the lamb would suffer the death of their firstborn son. The Israelites placed the blood on their doorframe; the Egyptians did not.

The next morning weeping could be heard throughout the kingdom because each Egyptian home had lost their firstborn son. Now Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron during the night and tells them to get out of Egypt. So these slaves simply walk out of the country; they are free. God accompanies them on their short journey (it was only a few days) to the Red Sea.

But at the edge of the sea trouble comes, Pharaoh and his army had decided to pursue the Israelites and now the Israelites have before them the Red Sea and behind them Pharaoh and his army. They are terrified and say to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you, in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Exodus 14:11-12)

1. Sin of Rebellion

The first sin noted in this Psalm is the sin of rebellion. It is a root sin and from it other sins will grow. The Psalmist tells us in verse 7 "When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea."

How can this be? How could they not give thought to God's miracles? They had witnessed 10 plagues: The Nile River had turned to blood. The nation was invaded by frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts. The people were plagued with boils, death of their livestock, and the worst hailstorm in Egyptian history. They saw darkness descend on the land of Egypt for three days and yet the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. The lives of their firstborn sons had been spared. How could they not give thought to the miracles of God?

¹ Boice, James Montgomery. Psalms: Volume 2, Psalms 42-106. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1996. pp 853-859.

Perhaps a better question is how can we not give thought to the miracles of God? We have all the ancient miracles recorded in the Bible including the ultimate miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as our own experience with God's miracles. Yet we too in the midst of crises have short memories.

When we give no thought to God's miracles and forget his many kindnesses; rebellion is not far behind. We must take active steps to guard against spiritual forgetfulness and the rebellion that springs from it. We can record God's miracles and kindness by writing them down in a journal, both the miracles that we read about in the Bible and the ones we experience. We can also record miracles with technological devices, like digital and video cameras, and tape recorders. We can record our memories by depositing them in the lives of others by sharing with family and friends, and small groups members.

Once we record our miracles we need to review them and repeat them so they are so well known to us that when we are in a crisis they come immediately to mind. This process reminds us of who God really is and how much He cares for us.

God's response to their rebellion is to save them and redeem them. God crafts a solution as only He can and He does it for His glory not because of their worthiness. Now they believe Him and sing his praises. Unfortunately it is a short song.

Time Period #2: Wanderings in the Desert

We now come to the second time period, the period of the wanderings in the desert. It was a relatively short journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, but the path of disobedience is significantly longer and much more painful.

2. Sin of Discontent

¹⁴ In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test.

We come to the next major crisis in the desert, food. The particular instance mentioned here seems to be a combination of events recorded in Exodus 16 and Numbers 11. First, they grumble that they have no food, next they grumble because they are tired of the food that they have.

They grumbled that as slaves they had the choicest of fine foods. Let's listen in, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out in this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16) You have to wonder if the same memory that forgot God's miracles and kindnesses was also suffering from a little lapse in terms of accuracy. Do you really think as slaves they had all the food they wanted? God gave them miraculous food, manna, which appeared on the desert floor each morning; but after a while the people grew tired of the manna and complained that they wanted a more varied diet.

We too suffer from the sin of discontent. Often instead of being thankful for the miraculous provisions that we have (like freedom, food, homes, jobs, health,) we grumble about what we do not have (bigger more expensive homes, more exciting restaurants in town, more interesting careers, needing to loose a few pounds).

3. Sin of Jealousy

The next sin the Psalmist recounts is that of jealousy.

¹⁶ In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD.

God had appointed Moses as their leader, sort of the head of their government you might say, and Aaron his older brother had been consecrated to serve as priest, loosely we might say the head of the church. But the people were not happy with either appointment. Korah and 250 leaders among the people rose up and came as a group to Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" (Numbers 16:3) This is sort of the ancient version of "Who died and left you in charge?"

The people were jealous of their leaders. They did not want them in authority over them. They thought they were just as holy, just as qualified, and just as capable; so they stage a takeover.

Notice their leaders were Godly men appointed by God. These men did not abuse the people or mistreat them in any way. In fact, Moses was willing to lay down his life for them. But all of these things were not enough to hold back the jealousy of the people.

I realize given the last few weeks of news headlines that there are some individuals in leadership that are not Godly examples and do not live lives of integrity; however given this instance from ancient Israel I think we would do well to ponder the sin of the people. How many times when we disagree with those in authority is the problem one of being a poor follower rather than having a poor leader? How many times are we acting from the sin of jealousy when we challenge the positional authority of our leaders whether they are elected officials, our pastor, our boss, our children's teachers, or others. Romans 13:1 says "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

4. Sin of Idolatry

Next noted is the Sin of Idolatry. This is the well-known incident of the Golden Calf.

¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal.

²⁰ They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass.

²¹ They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt,

²² miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days. It seems the people and Aaron had given up hope for his return. They convinced Aaron that since Moses was apparently not coming back they were going to need not only a new leader, but a new God. So they decided to create one, and interestingly it would look just like one of the Egyptian idols.

This issue of idolatry was an ingrained problem for the children of Israel dating even back to the time of Abraham. Joshua 24:2 . . . "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.'

Ezekiel 20:6-8, On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. ⁷And I said to them, "Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. ⁸But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.

The nation just never seemed to disentangle itself from idols. I wonder sometimes if we just gloss over this sin because we don't think it really applies to us. We aren't bowing down to golden calves. But something that was so insidious to the ancients is worthy of our attention.

Idols of course can be things we fashion with our hands to look like people, birds, animals, or reptiles and many religions in the world construct these types of idols.

But an idol can also be anything that we look to as a God that consumes our time, resources, and priorities to such an extent that they are more important than God. These can be things like our homes, our careers, our bank accounts, our health, television, and even our families. Perhaps one of the biggest idols in our culture is self: my rights, my needs, my wants, my choice, my happiness, me, me, me.

5. Sin of Unbelief

Next, is the Sin of Unbelief. We should note at this point that this account is not in strict chronological order. The purpose of the Psalmist is not to teach us history but the spiritual lessons of history.

²⁴ Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise.

²⁵ They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.

These verses refer to report from the spies that were sent to scout the Promised Land and its military strength. The spies, except for Joshua and Caleb, report that the land is too hard for them to take, the people are giants and the land actually is not that desirable. They whine and complain to Moses and Aaron with their tiresome litany, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt. (Exodus 14:2,3,4)

Oh, my. The people prefer slavery under a pagan, rather than freedom under God who rescued and redeemed them. Here they stood on the edge of the Promised Land, a land that God had picked out especially for them as a special gift; but that don't believe that God will take them the rest of the way despite all the miracles that God had shown them. The Sin of Unbelief was costly. All those over the age of 20, except Caleb and Joshua would die in the desert. They would spend the next 38 years wandering aimlessly until this was accomplished. They were so close to the blessing and yet the missed it.

Unbelief is refusing to act on what God has clearly revealed to us. We practice the sin of unbelief when we refuse to seek out and use our spiritual gifts. We practice the sin of unbelief when we refuse to tell others of our faith. We practice unbelief when we refuse to live by standards of sexual purity. We practice unbelief when we refuse to submit to the authority of our husbands. We practice unbelief when we distort the truth in our business or personal life in order to gain a worldly reward. In each case, we are trusting in ourselves rather than in God. We are believing what we reason to be true rather than accepting that God has more knowledge and experience than we do.

6. Sin of Apostasy

The sixth sin is that of apostasy. Now apostasy is one of those words used in theology circles, but I don't really know what it means if I have to define it cold. So I thought a dictionary definition might be helpful to us. Apostasy according to the World Book Dictionary is a complete forsaking of one's religion. Wow, a complete forsaking of one's religion. Surely this can't mean the people of God; the people specifically chosen by Him, miraculously freed from bondage in Egypt, and led by his visible presence in the desert.

²⁸ They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods;

²⁹ they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them.

This event is recorded in Numbers 25 ¹While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ²who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. ³So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them."

The people had just come from a spiritual victory. The King of Moab had hired a pagan prophet named Balaam to curse the people. But no matter what the King offered or threatened, Balaam under the control of God blessed the nation over and over again. But what the King of Moab and his hired pagan prophet could not do, the Moabite women did. They invited the Israelite men to worship their gods. They eat and bow down before these gods and engage in lewd forms of sexuality in their worship. The people of God who have been supported in every way through their journey by God, now forsake God. No wonder the Lord was angry.

Apostasy is one of those sins that probably each of us would say, that would never happen to me. But the Israelites did not plan for it to happen to them either. We must be on our guard until our last breath that we remain faithful to the God who has been so faithful and merciful to us.

7. Sin of Insurrection

The seventh sin is the sin of Insurrection. There is another one of those hard words. So let's go back to the World Book Dictionary. Insurrection is the rising against established authority. ³² By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; ³³ for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips."

The people complained at the waters of Meribah. It is now about 40 years after their Exodus from Egypt. This is the new generation but they are plagued by some of the same attitudes as their ancestors. They are thirsty and there is no water. Keep in mind God has provided water to them for 40 years, but they still do not trust Him. So they go to Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! Why did you bring the Lord's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink! (Numbers 20:3-5)

Moses falls on his face before the LORD. God tells him to take the staff and speak to the rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. Moses instead strikes the rock and utters rash words.

I have always found this story of Moses unsettling; but I have always thought about it from Moses' perspective. What exactly was His sin and why did it merit such severe punishment? However, in this passage we are given another perspective on the whole event. The Psalmist says the people angered the LORD and trouble came to Moses because of them. The people rebelled against the Spirit of God and rash words came from Moses' lips.

Moses sinned in his words and actions and he was disciplined; but here we learn the people had a role in that sin and God is holding them accountable as well. That is a very sobering thought. When we see sin in our leaders whether in our government or in our church or in our community, we are quick to point it out and require discipline; but do we as followers ever ask what was my part in their sin? Was it my complaining, was it my bickering, was it my incessant discontent with the person's leadership that pushed that leader to the edge and contributed to their yielding to sin?

Time Period #3: Occupation of the Promised Land

The 40 years of wandering are almost complete and the people, a new generation, stand at the edge of the Promised Land once again. This time the people do obey and do cross the Jordan and do take the capital city of Jericho. They obey, for a time . . . and then they begin to accommodate to the culture around them.

8. Sin of Accommodation

One definition of accommodation is the process by which individuals or social groups adjust to one another so as to overcome conflicts. The people of God avoided conflict all right, they ceded every point to their enemies. They ignored God's instruction to destroy the nations in the land, and they ignored God's warnings of the destruction that would come if they did not obey.

³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them, ³⁵ but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. ³⁶ They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. ³⁷ They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. ³⁸ They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood. ³⁹ They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.

We as Christians are to honor all human beings as people made in God's image and as people for whom Jesus Christ suffered and died. And as much as it is in our power to do so we are to live at peace with others. However, I am worried that we are quickly moving from a Godly respect and honoring of human beings toward a total accommodation of their religious beliefs.

We need to be careful not to replicate the Israelites' sin of accommodation because as a result they worshipped idols and murdered their sons and daughters. The Israelites heard the warning; but I don't think they grasped its seriousness. They listened to their own logic, rather than to God. I wonder if we grasp the seriousness of the warning.

Conclusion

We come to the end of this Psalm and a dismal one it has been. Israel is guilty of the sins of rebellion, discontent, jealousy, idolatry, unbelief, apostasy, insurrection, and accommodation. God warned them with words and with increasingly severe methods of discipline; but he never turned his back on them. He was determined to guide them into a people uniquely His.

The greatest miracle in this Psalm and in the whole Bible is that God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us even though we do not deserve it. We, even with thousands of years of recorded historical stories about obedience have committed the very same list of sins as the Israelites. So from this Psalm I think we walk away with two final lessons. First, we must listen to the warnings: 1 Corinthians 10:6- 12 says,

⁶Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹²So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

The second lesson is that God is faithful. And so the Psalm ends in praise to a faithful God who never gives up on us, His People: ⁴⁸ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD.