

Psalm 107 • His Lovingkindness

Introduction

Psalm 107 begins what is labeled in many Bibles as “Book V” of the Psalms. This book—or collection—of Psalms was most likely assembled upon the Israelites return to the land of Israel at the end of their captivity in Babylon. After 70 years of captivity, the return to Israel was a monumental sign of the Lord to those returning, something that is very rare in all of human history. How many times has a nation that was conquered and dispersed found their way back to their original country and re-formed themselves? So it’s no surprise that the very first Psalm in the final book of the Psalms strongly emphasizes “hesed”—the Hebrew word translated in the NASB as “lovingkindness”.

Human love is almost always expressed by a different word in Hebrew, “aheb”, which when referring to man’s love for or towards God usually involves obedience. God’s love expressed to man is most often expressed as “hesed”, most closely meaning “lovingkindness”. The closest NT equivalent may be “grace”, but that doesn’t quite get it. “Lovingkindness” is the expression of God’s determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion. It’s not an apathetic response to sin, but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God. It’s God’s divine mercy and forgiveness toward sinners when repayment of sins through the sacrificial system was no longer effective. “Hesed” is always an expression of love by God to someone with which He has a relationship. The 2 words it’s most closely associated with are “covenant” and “faithfulness”.

Imagine how precious this concept was to a nation thought at one point to be completely destroyed—even dead—only to come back to life and returned to Him both physically and spiritually. Although the returning Israelites experienced spiritual reawakening in their covenant and faithfulness to God, they were painfully aware it was nothing they accomplished on their own but only by His lovingkindness alone.

¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary
³And gathered from the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: How does this introduction to the Psalm fit with the definition of lovingkindness provided above?

A: His love endures for the purpose of redeeming the sinner, of bringing them back to Him spiritually. The redeemed are those that He has never given up on and who have responded spiritually to His gathering them back. It the very picture of the meaning of God’s lovingkindness.

Observation

In v.4-32 are 4 teachings of the nature of God’s lovingkindness. Although they vary in length, each is structured in the exact same order: (1) the people’s sin, (2) the people’s cry for a return to God, (3) God’s application of His lovingkindness, and (4) the praise due Him for that lovingkindness. Identify each of these sub-sections and then summarize what they teach about God’s lovingkindness.

⁴They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region;
They did not find a way to an inhabited city.
⁵They were hungry and thirsty;
Their soul fainted within them.
⁶Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble;
He delivered them out of their distresses.
⁷He led them also by a straight way,
To go to an inhabited city.
⁸Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
⁹For He has satisfied the thirsty soul,
And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

[Read v.4-9]

(v.4-5) **The Sin:** The nation Israel, having first rejected taking hold of the Promised Land, wandered not just in a physical wilderness but a spiritual one, experiencing 40 years of spiritual thirst and hunger that produced a wanting soul. (Or in the case of the return from Babylon, 70 years of captivity.)

(v.6) **The Cry:** The Lord responded to those who finally turned to Him.

(v.7) **His Lovingkindness:** He provided the spiritual path to enable them to both be reconciled and obedient in order to live according to His ways. [Note: The phrase “straight way” may sound familiar as this is the role of John the Baptist in preparing the people for Christ’s earthly ministry. See Luke 3:3-6.]

(v.8-9) **The Praise:** His enduring love worked miracles to bring the spiritual food and water necessary to satisfy their soul.

Q: What is the first quality of God’s lovingkindness?

A: It endures to satisfy our soul.

Application: *The Israelites between Egypt and the Promised Land often grumbled more about their physical circumstances than the spiritual. Do you understand that God often uses physical circumstances to get you to see the need to address the spiritual root causes? Are you or have you ever been in a situation where it took extreme physical circumstances to get you to turn to God? Did He simply erase the circumstances, or were there spiritual steps on your part?*

[Read v.10-16]

¹⁰There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death,
Prisoners in misery and chains,
¹¹Because they had rebelled against the words of God
And spurned the counsel of the Most High.
¹²Therefore He humbled their heart with labor;
They stumbled and there was none to help.
¹³Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble;
He saved them out of their distresses.
¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death
And broke their bands apart.
¹⁵Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
¹⁶For He has shattered gates of bronze
And cut bars of iron asunder.

(v.10-12) **The Sin:** To rebel against God is to make someone or something else one’s master in place of Him. Instead of having the “words of God” to light his path, the rebel has only the darkness and chains of the new master.

(v.13) **The Cry:** The Lord responded to those who finally turned to Him.

(v.14) **His Lovingkindness:** Following the “words of God” produces spiritual freedom, breaks the spiritual bonds placed by false masters, rescues one from the edge of eternal death to which such masters ultimately lead.

(v.15-16) **The Praise:** He worked miracles on behalf of prisoners that on their own could have never overcome the gates that locked them in and the iron bars that covered the windows to prevent escape.

Q: What is the second quality of God’s lovingkindness?

A: It endures to set our soul free.

Application: *What enslaves you? Is it God’s Word for freedom or a substitute that keeps you in darkness? How can you identify masters to whom you have given authority for an area of your life? [Hint: Those things furthest from adhering to His Word.]*

¹⁷Fools, because of their rebellious way,
And because of their iniquities, were
afflicted.
¹⁸Their soul abhorred all kinds of food,
And they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹Then they cried out to the LORD in their
trouble;
He saved them out of their distresses.
²⁰He sent His word and healed them,
And delivered them from their
destructions.
²¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for
His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
²²Let them also offer sacrifices of
thanksgiving,
And tell of His works with joyful singing.

²³Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters;
²⁴They have seen the works of the LORD,
And His wonders in the deep.
²⁵For He spoke and raised up a stormy
wind,
Which lifted up the waves of the sea.
²⁶They rose up to the heavens, they went
down to the depths;
Their soul melted away in their misery.
²⁷They reeled and staggered like a
drunken man,
And were at their wits' end.
²⁸Then they cried to the LORD in their
trouble,
And He brought them out of their
distresses.
²⁹He caused the storm to be still,
So that the waves of the sea were hushed.
³⁰Then they were glad because they were
quiet,
So He guided them to their desired haven.
³¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for
His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!
³²Let them extol Him also in the
congregation of the people,
And praise Him at the seat of the elders.

[Read v.17-22]

(v.17-18) **The Sin:** They took rebellion to a new level by committing evil and wickedness (the definition of “iniquity”). When such evil and wickedness is allowed to take root, it cause the soul to actually become repulsed by the Word of God, the spiritual food necessary to restore one back to good spiritual health.

(v.19) **The Cry:** The Lord responded to those who finally turned to Him.

(v.20) **His Lovingkindness:** His Word—the only spiritual food that could save them—was delivered through Moses, the prophets, etc.

(v.21-22) **The Praise:** He worked miracles to bring them His Word that are worthy of the right sacrifices of an upright and joyful heart that has been restored by His enduring love.

Q: What is the third quality of God's lovingkindness?

A: It endures to heal our soul.

Application: *Have you considered that if you reject even the discussion of God's Word concerning an area of your life, that this behavior in and of itself identifies a problem area of sin? What should you do for yourself or on the behalf of another with such a condition?*

[Read v.23-32]

(v.23-27) **The Sin:** There are those who allow their job and/or the accumulation of wealth to replace the authority and place of God in their life. They are never able to achieve the happiness they so fervently pursue and actually become more and more miserable and insecure.

(v.28) **The Cry:** The Lord responded to those who finally turned to Him.

(v.29-30) **His Lovingkindness:** He redirects them to the safe place they were wrongly seeking through their own efforts. It's accomplished not by their own works but the miraculous works of God.

(v.31-32) **The Praise:** To not only praise Him personally but to testify publicly of how His enduring love brings the true fulfillment of our heart's desire.

Q: What is the fourth quality of God's lovingkindness?

A: It endures to put our soul at peace.

Application: *Do you—or someone you know—believe that if your time is not spent in another religious pursuit, but merely on earthly needs, that it's somehow not replacing God? Have you noticed how the more consumed a person gets with obtaining financial security, how often they become more afraid of losing it? Does this result in more or less peace? Have they arrived at the “safe haven” they so desired in the first place?*

³³He changes rivers into a wilderness
And springs of water into a thirsty
ground;

³⁴A fruitful land into a salt waste,
Because of the wickedness of those who
dwell in it.

³⁵He changes a wilderness into a pool of
water
And a dry land into springs of water;

³⁶And there He makes the hungry to
dwell,
So that they may establish an inhabited
city,

³⁷And sow fields and plant vineyards,
And gather a fruitful harvest.

³⁸Also He blesses them and they multiply
greatly,
And He does not let their cattle decrease.

³⁹When they are diminished and bowed
down
Through oppression, misery and sorrow,

⁴⁰He pours contempt upon princes
And makes them wander in a pathless
waste.

⁴¹But He sets the needy securely on high
away from affliction,
And makes his families like a flock.

⁴²The upright see it and are glad;
But all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.

⁴³Who is wise? Let him give heed to these
things,
And consider the lovingkindnesses of the
LORD.

Quick Summary

Q: What are the 4 characteristics of God's lovingkindness?

1. It endures to satisfy our soul.
2. It endures to set our soul free.
3. It endures to heal our soul.
4. It endures to put our soul at peace.

Q: What is the main focus of concern of God's lovingkindness and why?

A: Our soul. It's redeeming us for all eternity—both this life and the next—not out of momentary circumstances.

[Read v.33-38]

Q: What is the difference between God's works in v.33-34 versus 35-38?

A: He takes away whatever's necessary to give sinners the opportunity to see from their own circumstances that they need to return to Him (v.33-34), versus responding to those acknowledging their need for Him by supplying every spiritual resource in abundance.

Application: How satiated is your soul right now? For what do you hunger and thirst and desire? What does this teach you about yourself? How will God probably work on those hungers, thirsts, and desires?

[Read v.39-43]

Q: What is the basic message conveyed in v.39-41?

A: Earthly appearances of one's place and position are not always equal to one's place in the eyes and estimation of God. Those who appear to have much are in reality wandering in spiritual darkness, while those who often appear to lack earthly goods and title are the most spiritually secure.

Q: What is the response of these two disparate parties according to v.42?

A: "The upright"—those responding to His lovingkindness—realize the reality of the situation and that they are secure eternally even if earthly circumstances are temporarily less than ideal. "Unrighteousness" is dumbfounded by its inability to resolve it all on their own through their own means.

Q: What is the solution?

A: To "give heed to these things"—that is, to respond to the Lord by not just acknowledging Him but being obedient to Him.

Overall Application

- How do you feel about God's enduring concern for your soul? What would happen if you shared the same level of concern?
- In light of this teaching about the true character and quality of God's lovingkindness, how do you see the true meaning of your current circumstances?
- What does this Psalm reveal about God's work in restoring Israel from Babylon? What does it teach concerning this final gathering of all Jews to Israel, its true purpose, and how it will be visible in their lives?