

## **Give Thanks for Deliverance**

Psalm 107

October 17, 2021

I find myself praying thanks for deliverance often in intercessory prayers for others, and those occasions almost always have to do with health issues. In our day, and at our age, health questions seem to be first and foremost. But when I think about the times I have needed help the most in my younger years, when I was facing great difficulties, those were not typically health issues. Many of my problems had to do with my own maturity (or lack of same) or my own behavior or responses to events in the world around me. Sometimes in the moment I didn't even think to pray, but later recognized that God was there and was a help to me.

This psalm is an interesting journey through various situations we might find ourselves in, needing help. The heart of the psalm is composed of four similar stanzas, each of which deals with a different situation. In each, the psalmist (and those reading together with him) pray to God for relief. God answers, Then the psalmist (and us) give praise and thanks to God. Then there is a separate section at the end that is a hymn to the power of God and His steadfast love, a general thanks that sort of sums up what we learn from the various experiences earlier.

- 1) vs. 1-3 Introduction: A summon to give praise to the Lord.
- 2) vs. 4-9 Those who are lost in deserted places
- 3) vs. 10-16 Those in prison, confined, oppressed
- 4) vs. 17-22 Those who are ill
- 5) vs. 23-32 Those who must travel on the sea (perilous travel, storms)
- 6) vs. 33-43 Conclusion: a hymn of thanksgiving and praise

The lesson book includes the introduction, the first scenario of need, and the final hymn:

### **Psalm 107 Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Many Troubles (NRSV)**

**<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;**

**for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**<sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,**

those he redeemed from trouble  
<sup>3</sup> and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;  
<sup>5</sup> hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
<sup>6</sup> Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress;  
<sup>7</sup> he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.  
<sup>8</sup> Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
<sup>9</sup> For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things.  
...[The other four scenarios]....  
...[The power of the LORD over nature]....  
<sup>39</sup> When they are diminished and brought low  
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,  
<sup>40</sup> he pours contempt on princes  
and makes them wander in trackless wastes;  
<sup>41</sup> but he raises up the needy out of distress,  
and makes their families like flocks.  
<sup>42</sup> The upright see it and are glad;  
and all wickedness stops its mouth.  
<sup>43</sup> Let those who are wise give heed to these things,  
and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

#### Footnotes

a. [Psalm 107:3](#) Cn: Heb *sea*

The situation described in the Psalm is rather unfamiliar to many of us these days. There are desert areas and wastelands within the United States, but unless you deliberately go someplace like that as part of an adventure, you are unlikely to find yourself lost. Furthermore, at least within the United States, the danger of being attacked by wild animals and human predators in the wilderness is rather remote. Yes, it can happen. When it does, it always makes the news, because it is so unusual. On the other hand, there are places in our modern day cities that I would be very nervous about visiting, especially at night. In the psalm, a “city to dwell in” (RSV) – “an inhabited town” in NRSV - is a place of safety, where a wall and a gate (or more than one gate in a larger city) protects those inside from wild beasts and bandits.

Of course, the cities of antiquity would perhaps seem like mere “towns” to us modern people. But the idea of a place of refuge is important. In the United States people felt secure enough to dwell in individual houses on their farm, even during the early days of this country.



In contrast, in the ancient middle East and even in Europe, people dwelled in towns and went out of the town to work their individual lands, such was the danger of being found alone outside of the protection that a town (often with walls) offered. The wall was so important a part of a town (or city) that the wall was in fact the back wall of individual houses, built side by side, so that the added expense of the wall was primarily the gatehouse structure. (That’s how it was that people could be let down outside the wall through a window, as with Paul escaping from Damascus and the spies from Jericho.

[Photos from < <https://www.bibleplaces.com/judeanwilderness/>>]

The psalmist prays to God for relief. Prayer was answered. “He led them by a straight way.” The King James may be more accurate as translating this as “... by the right way.” How would God do that? I can think of several ways. Someone left a lighted lamp on a rooftop, perhaps. Or the wanderer comes across tracks where a shepherd or someone else passed on returning to the town. Perhaps a rock outcropping provided a place where a view could be obtained.

Finding the “right way” to get to the town or city, even if you could see it, remained a nontrivial issue. Consider the Judean Wilderness, south of Jerusalem beside the Dead Sea. You can find it in a



computer map program. It is laced with canyons cutting across the extremely dry landscape. Here’s a couple of pictures. Imagine wandering in a place like that! It’s not flat. How to get to even a place you can see is a difficult problem to solve.

Having reached safety, the psalmist sings the refrain that follows each case in verse 8: **“Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.”** (It is “the sons of men” in RSV, “children of men” in KJV, both stronger expressions, I think.) There is an almost identical verse in each of the other four cases. Then in verse 9 you see the specific, but now generalized, expression of thanks in this particular case.

The concluding hymn recognizes God’s power over nature in verses 33-38 (which our lesson book skips). The LORD can change the good into bad, and the bad into good. This does happen. It’s called “climate change” now. We often in our time focus only on the bad – once fertile lands drying up, for example, without recognizing that in other places once useless land is supporting growth, and that areas too cold for trees or agriculture are becoming warmer. That can have

benefits. The modern world focuses on the bad and says, “How can you believe in God when such things happen?”

Verses 40-41 focus on God’s work at the individual level. Verse 39’s “they” seems to refer to “the poor” of verse 41. (It may be that verse order has been mixed up, but the intent is fairly clear. Trying to trace pronouns is a common issue of interpretation.) The point is that God will bless those who are brought low through oppression, trouble or sorrow. In 43 we have the thought to take away from the whole psalm. Those who are wise will see what the LORD has done and recognize his “loving-kindness”(KJV) / “steadfast love” (RSV and NRSV). The word translated “steadfast love” is the Hebrew word “hesed,” which doesn’t quite completely translate to English. I think it’s useful to see where else this word is used. Here are a few instances:

1. Deut. 7:12 “covenant loyalty” in the NRSV, God to the Israelites in the covenant
2. 1 Samuel 20:8: the “sacred covenant” between Jonathan and David
3. 2 Samuel 22:26: God’s loyal love, similar to this in Psalm 107
4. Ruth 1:8 In Ruth, even for the love that Naomi has received from God in the midst of tragedy. Later, Boaz is a vessel of this same kind of love.
5. Psalm 106:45 Again, in the Psalm just before this one, God “remembers: His covenant. For the sake of His people, shows compassion and loving-kindness.

We each have our own personal stories of having been lost, been oppressed by others, ill, or in danger while traveling. It is our blessing when we can see in our salvation the LORD’s hand at work. Our spirits are lifted, and we can give praise to the LORD for his mercy and love. We can then live lives both blessed and blessing others, instead of complaining and finding fault. That’s how God intended us to live.

*Prayer: Lord, we give thanks to you for you are good, because your steadfast love endured forever! Help us, we pray, to deepen our thanks for your deliverance in our lives. Amen.*