

When You Need Rescue From An Absolutely Hopeless Situation

Psalm 107

INTRODUCTION

Me

Question is in this psalm: Are there four groups or one? If four, then the redeemed are doubtless intended to represent by illustration all those who have experienced the redemption of the Lord. The recurring statement is found in 8, 15, 21, 31

Leupold

THOUGH THIS PSALM marks the beginning of the fifth book of the Psalter it is, nevertheless, closely related to the two psalms that precede it. Let just a few indications of this be given. Ps. 105, of a character all its own, leads the reader through Israel's history to the time of the Exodus. Ps. 106 carries him along to the time of the going into the Babylonian Captivity. Ps. 107 takes up the sequence referring to the Restoration from this exile. Thus it might also be noted that Ps. 106:47 prays for the Restoration; Ps. 107 thanks for the Restoration. ¶The main point at issue in interpretation is whether the psalm is to be regarded as thinking in terms of the Restoration throughout, or whether after reflecting on this event the writer branches out into various areas of life where God's providential care has been noted and thus may be said to meditate on the manifold expressions of God's providence. Though the former of these approaches has now been largely abandoned, it cannot be dismissed as being of no consequence. ¶What follows in a series of four successive life situations merely presents the Restoration figuratively from the point of view of each of these. For the Exile was much like having a caravan lost in the wilderness and straying about aimlessly (vv. 4—9). It was also like an imprisonment (vv. 10—16). Again the Restoration was very much like a recovery from severe illness (vv. 17—22). And it surely cannot be denied that the deliverance had many points of similarity with the deliverance of a ship at sea from the dangers of a great storm which threatened the life of all aboard (vv. 23—32). These are not farfetched comparisons but are apt in every sense. ¶These four figurative representations of the Exile and deliverance therefrom fall into a certain pattern: a trying and dangerous situation is described; then God's help in answer to the cry of men; then the summons to praise Him for what he has done in a refrain that recurs in vv. 8, 15, 21, and 31; and finally a special concluding summons to praise adapted to the individual case. But in the section vv. 33—43 this pattern is abandoned, and a summary presentation of God's providential government of men in all manner of situations is set forth. This latter section could be regarded as a congregational hymn. The preceding separate parts could be thought of as being examples of great dangers from which God delivered His own. ... A possible occasion for the liturgical rendition of a psalm like this might be that described in Ezra 3: 1—7, where the first Feast of Tabernacles was kept after return from the Exile.¹

¶One somewhat unique approach to the entire problem of the psalm may yet be indicated. Eerdmans regards these several groups mentioned as groups of exiles who either became sick, or were imprisoned, or were scattered widely as a result of the Exile. This approach has possibilities.²

¹ Leupold, *Psalms*, pp. 753-755.

² Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 761.

Allen

Imposed upon this original psalm is a fresh interpretation related to the community. They owe their entire existence to Yahweh's goodness. The exile was past, and from all over the ancient world Jews were being repatriated— by Yahweh!—to their homeland. He had claimed them back as his own people, and of that truth their presence in the temple was a proof. They had an obligation to render communal thanksgiving for his covenant grace. From land and sea they had come. Homeward bound, they had endured the dangers of desert and ocean. They were so glad to be home in their own land, in Jerusalem and in their settlements (vv 7, 36). Now they are urged to turn their relief and joy into thanksgiving and praise.

But a deeper spiritual note also needed to be struck. Rebellion against Yahweh had sent them into exile (cf. Ps 106). It had been a prison where they had had to serve their sentence (Isa 42:7; 49:9; cf. Mic 7:8). It had been a sickbed to which their own moral perversity had sent them (cf. 147:2— 3; 2 Chr 36:16; Isa 53:4; Jer 33:6, 7). But Yahweh's liberating and healing word had come to them with assurance of forgiveness (cf. Isa 40:1—2). How gladly the restored community could add to the priest's report its own Amen in the form of offering and song.

The final parts of the psalm take up terms from the strophes which spoke of traveling home and weaves them into a meditation of praise concerning the activity of Yahweh. It is spoken from the perspective of the community as pious and poor (v 41), out of a deep sense of the moral providence of their God. The God of the storm can cause similar disruption on land. Sodom is a warning to believers concerning the havoc to which wickedness can lead.³

...¶The psalm celebrates the deliverance of God both in the lives of individuals and in the life of the religious community. It celebrates, too, divine forgiveness which brings liberation and renewal of life to sinful men. As it praises, it intends also to teach concerning the way of folly and the way of wisdom. Divine providence concerning both the overthrown of tyrants and the blessing of the faithful must teach a moral lesson. The message spoken from faith to faith is that God rules in the lives of men and works wonders of love and power. ¶In the NT divine deliverance is focused upon the agency of Jesus Christ. He announced an era of liberation and performed wondrous works of healing and stilling of the storm. These proclaim their perpetrator to be Lord of nature, bringer of wholeness and forgiveness and ruler of the lives of men, who in response are summoned to praise and thanksgiving (Luke 4:18—19; 8:22—25; 17:11—19; cf. Acts 12:1—17).⁴

Kidner

The centre-piece of this striking psalm is the set of four word-pictures of human predicaments and divine interventions. In Themselves the adventures are not characteristically Israelite situations; yet the fact that this is a piece to celebrate the return of exiles raises the possibility that these episodes are four different ways of depicting the plight from which the nation had been delivered. 'The scenes are at once fact and figure; scenes from life, yet intended to represent Israel's experience. This is especially clear in verses 10-16, where some touches are obviously national and personal' (Kirkpatrick). ¶A final section (33—43) enlarges on the great reversals of fortune which God delights to bring about in the affairs of men.⁵

Mays

The redeemed are divided into four groups in terms of kinds of adversity, and a stanza is devoted to each: those who were perishing from hunger and thirst (vv. 4—9), those who were in

³ Allen, *Psalms*, p. 64.

⁴ Allen, *Psalms*, p. 65.

⁵ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 383

prison (vv. 10—16), those who were sick unto death (vv. 17—22), and those who were in a storm at sea (vv. 23—32). Each stanza is shaped in a similar way: an account of their adversity, their cry to the LORD, and his deliverance; then a summons to praise the LORD for his *hesed*. The report of the cry and deliverance (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28) and the summons to praise (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31) are identical in each stanza. In verses 33—41 the theme of the “wonderful works” in the summons is taken up in a hymnic recitation of ways in which the LORD reverses the conditions of human beings so as to gladden the upright and silence wickedness (v. 42; I Sam. 2:4—8; Job 5:11—16). A concluding admonition commends all that has been said about God and human beings as evidence of the LORD’S loyal love (v. 43).⁶ ... ¶ The list seems to be one that suits the experiences of the exiles and the dispersion. The language of God the redeemer and the returnees as the redeemed is characteristic of Isaiah 40—66 (e.g., Isa. 51:10; 62:12; 63:4; 35:9). The redeemed have been assembled from the dispersion (v. 2). The types of adversity must symbolize the corporate experience of the people who had wandered hungry and thirsty for the salvation of God “in the great desert of the world”; had been imprisoned in the exile, had been terminally ill because of their transgressions, and “had been all but swallowed up in the vast sea of the nations” (Kirkpatrick, pp. 637f.). Thus the psalm can be understood as praise for Israel’s second salvation history.⁷ ... *Hesed* is the obvious theme named in the opening summons as the content of praise (v. 1), reiterated in the repetition of the summons as the reason for praise (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31), and proposed at the conclusion as the subject for thought by the wise (v. 43). The conclusion makes it clear that the psalm is not only exaltation but as well exposition of *hesed*. It is praise that is to be thought about, reflected on; it is a text from which the wise can learn about the *hesed* of the LORD. Its performance has an instructional effect; through it the upright “see” the *hesed* of the LORD and rejoice, while the voice of wrong is silenced (v. 42). ... ¶ In Psalm 107 the *hesed* of the LORD is a matter of his relation to those who cry out to him. No other basis is mentioned than the goodness of the LORD and the cry of those in trouble. The beneficiaries of the wonderful works are “the som of men” (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). No special relation between Israel and the LORD is cited. Twice those in trouble suffer as sinners (vv. 11, 17), but in the other two cases they come into trouble inadvertently. What sets the *hesed* of the LORD in motion in every case is the cry to the LORD in trouble. The psalm sees the *hesed* of the LORD manifest in salvation completely in this way. It elevates the prayer for help, the voice of dependence on God, to the central place in the relation to God.⁸

In all these ways the psalm teaches the congregation and its members to understand themselves as the redeemed. Most of all and first of all they are the sinners and the helpless whose cry to God has been answered by his *hesed*. Most of all and first of all they are to thank the LORD with praise of his *hesed*. We are the hungry and thirsty who have been fed. We are the bound who have been liberated. We are the sinners deserving death who have been given life. We are the fearful before the terrors of existence who have been given hope.⁹

107:1

Leupold

This is obviously a summons to praise the Lord for having gathered the scattered members of Israel from all lands. The first line, “O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,” seems to have been a favorite just after the Exile and may have originated at that time. Since thanksgiving for even the greatest favors of the Lord is so frequently postponed and then finally completely forgotten, it is most proper to exhort men: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” In the enumeration of the areas from which the captives have been brought back the south is missing,

⁶ Mays, *Psalms*, p. 344.

⁷ Mays, *Psalms*, p.346.

⁸ Mays, *Psalms*, pp. 346, 347.

⁹ Mays, *Psalms*, p. 347.

for the very good reason, perhaps, that none were brought back from areas like Egypt. The demand that in enumerations like these all four cardinal points of the compass must be represented is quite artificial, and textual changes made to produce this result are quite questionable. Since the occasional points of contact between this psalm and the second half of Isaiah are rather obvious, it will be in order to indicate at least some of them. The expression “the redeemed (of the Lord)” is found also in Is. 62:12; 63:4. V. 3 reads much like Is. 43 :5, 6.¹⁰

Kidner

This opening call gives the psalm its setting in the great deliverance of Israel from exile, the theme on which the rest of the psalm rings the changes. The word *redeemed* brings echoes of the custom which obliged a kinsman to step in to rescue his close relative from debt or slavery (see the references at 69:18). God had done just that; and the word *gathered* answers the very prayer of 106 :47. This matching of petition and answer has persuaded some expositors that Psalms 105—107 are a trilogy, despite the traditional boundary between Books LV and V, telling the story of God’s grace in His choice and nurture of Israel (105), His forbearance and chastisement (106) and finally His reclamation of her (107). Kirkpatrick points out the link between the three in the expression *the lands*, crystallizing the promise (105:44), the punishment (106:27) and the rescue (107:3). MY NOTE: SEE ALSO *gatherings*, 106:47, 107:3¹¹

107:2

107:3

107:4

Kidner

In most modern versions, each of the next four stanzas has the same kind of opening (‘Some wandered...’ ‘Some sat in darkness...’ etc.), as though we were following the fortunes of different groups. This is inaccurate, and obscures the probability that the four scenes are four ways of looking at the same reality, namely the disastrous situation from which Israel has now been rescued. As that situation is analogous to the plight of all sinners, the psalm can be appreciated directly, not only through the eyes of Israel. ¶Looseness, hunger, thirst and exhaustion are all figures which our Lord was to employ in relation to His self-offer as the Way, the Bread and Water of life and the Giver of rest. The scene in this stanza unites all these aspects of salvation and crowns them with that of a *city to dwell in*: a climax without which the rescue, at either level of meaning, would be little more than first aid. The New Testament is full of it: *CF*, e.g., Ephesians 2:11ff. Hebrews 12:22ff.: Revelation 21 and 22.¹²

107:5

107:6

107:8

107:9

107:10

Leupold

¹⁰ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 756.

¹¹ Kidner, *Psalms*, pp. 383, 384

¹² Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 384.

When Israel was in Babylon, its sojourn there was like the experience of a man shut up in prison, wrapped in darkness and gloom, unable to free himself. In this case the reason assigned for imprisonment (this is usually overlooked) is not at all such a one as civil courts take note of, for v. 11 says: "They had rebelled against the words of God." That was Israel's root sin which led directly to the Captivity. The words of the prophets that God had sent them were not heeded (cf., Zech. 1:4). The good counsel that the Most High gave them was thus actually despised. Verse 12 is then a good description of Israel's lot, figuratively speaking, when many a heavy, burden of work was laid upon the captives, when they stumbled, and there was no one to help them. But when they humbled themselves and cried to the Lord, then deliverance dawned. For when He freed them, it was like having a mighty man come and shatter the bronze prison doors and hew asunder the bars of iron (v. 16). Here again v. 10 appears to refer to Is. 42:7 and 49:9; v. 16 draws on Is. 45:2...¹³

Kidner

Guilt (*cf.* 11), darkness, grinding toil, and the constriction of *bonds, doors* and *bars*, create another dimension of distress, distinct from the first scene; yet as a metaphor, whether of the exile or of the fallen state of man, it makes an apt companion to it. Until rescued, man is not simply lost in too wide a world, like the travellers of 4ff., or trapped in too small a one, like these prisoners; he is both.¹⁴

107:11

107:12

107:13

107:14

107:15

107:16

107:17

Leupold

The Restoration could also be likened to the recovery of health after a severe illness. The propriety of this comparison can scarcely be questioned. The basic assumption is that sickness is oftentimes punishment for sin. The truth of that claim should be admitted freely. ¶The recovery described has a unique point: it is attributed to a special messenger from God who heals the sick man, and this messenger is God's word. The word is regarded almost as a personal agent (*cf.*, Ps. 147:15, 18; Is. 55:11). In this instance the exhortation to praise the Lord adds the suggestion not to forget the sacrifices of thanksgiving, which were the traditional expression of thanks in public worship. This most wholesome suggestion does not yet stamp the psalm as being of liturgical design as some modern interpreters claim all too positively.¹⁵

Kidner

Sickness is certainly the plight described here, but not the kind of sickness that carries no blame.² The opening of verse 17 is not, as in RSV, TEV, *Some were sick*, but, bluntly, 'Fools,

¹³ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 757.

¹⁴ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 384.

¹⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p 758.

through their sinful ways . . .'; and fools in Scripture are the perverse, not the unintelligent. What is more, the verb as well as its supporting phrases points to their trouble as self-inflicted. In such a context, verse 18 could well call to mind in modern times the drug-addict, but only as one example of man's perennial determination to get hurt. ¶So the wages of sin, or at least its interim payment, must be added to the composite picture. With the previous stanza, this emphasizes guilt; in both cases man's fundamental guilt of spurning God's counsel, which is stated in verse 17 and now implied in the term 'fools' (17, see above). However, guilt shows up God's rescuing activity as grace: 'love to the loveless', not merely to the hapless (as in the rescue of the lost or the overwhelmed in verses 4—9 or 23—32).¹⁶

107:18

107:19

107:20

107:21

107:22

107:23

Leupold

Why should it be difficult to regard this description of a deliverance from a great storm at sea as being another figure of the deliverance of the nation of Israel from a grave danger that might well with its threatening billows have destroyed the nation forever? For that matter, nations often use this very figure when they say that the ship of state is threatened. The storm of the Captivity had swept over the nation; all seemed lost. It is true that not every little detail of this allegory, if such it may be called, calls for a special interpretation. Several details are inserted merely to make a complete picture: the ship mounting up to the heavens and dropping down again into the depths; the sailors staggering on deck; the utter helplessness of the crew. These features show how grave the danger was.¹⁷

Kidner

This fourth parable of Israel's former plight (and, by extension, humanity's as well) speaks not of our guilt but of our littleness. The hurricane shakes us into seeing that in a world of gigantic forces we live by permission, not by good management. The point is made explicitly in verse 27, where *wits* could be translated 'seamanship' (NEB). Cf TEV, 'all their skill was useless'. There are *wondrous works* to humble men as well as to save them (24, 31, using the same word). ¶If this is initially a figure of Israel's exile and deliverance, as the pattern of the psalm suggests (see above), it finds support (as Kissane points out) in the epithet 'storm-tossed' which Isaiah 54:11 uses of Jerusalem in the same connection. But the stilling of the lake-storm by our Lord as a sign for disciples ensures that we read this stanza as relevant to others besides Israelites and sailors.¹⁸

107:24

107:25

¹⁶ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 385.

¹⁷ Leupold, *Psalms*, p.759.

¹⁸ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 386

107:26**107:27****107:28****107:29****107:30****107:31****107:32****107:33****Leupold**

Far from marring the unity of the psalm, this last section puts the capstone upon the truths the psalm sets forth. Up till this point the issue was that it was the Lord who brought about this marvelous turn in the fortunes of Israel. There follows a section that turns from specific instances to a general truth: the up's and down's, the success and the failure, the prosperity and calamity in the lives of individuals and nations are entirely in the control of and brought about by the will of the Almighty. None are brought low or raised on high unless He wills it. ¶Quite a number of separate illustrations as to how this rule works are offered. A land that was fruitful and well watered may become dry ground, a "dust bowl" or a "salt waste." It seems most likely that at this point the writer had Sodom and Gomorrah in mind (Gen. 19:25, 26). The reverse can also happen. Arid, desiccated land becomes well watered and fruitful, and then He allows hungry people to dwell there and prosper, sow fields and plant vineyards, and increase greatly under the blessing of the Almighty. It seems that in these words there is a description of the completion of an irrigation project which succeeded because the Lord gave His benediction. The reverse may also be the case (v. 39). ¶Or moving to another group—princes may be humiliated and become dispossessed whereas the poor may be raised from their misery and become prosperous. Things like this do not just happen of themselves; they are proofs of the sovereign and wise providence of God. The righteous observe that such is the case and are glad over it and rejoice. In the face of this well-established truth wickedness must lapse into silence, for God governs this world effectively and well. With a precise proverb the psalm concludes by bidding men to learn this truth well if they would be wise and exhorting them to see how gracious the deeds of the Lord are.

Kidner

The psalm now drops the pattern of calamity—cry—salvation—thanksgiving, for a conclusion which draws out the lesson of God's sovereignty from experiences like these. A final verse, as an epilogue, makes sure that the lesson is not missed. ¶This recalls the desert scene of verses 4—9, but now it is not man who gets lost and found, but his habitat which dies on him or presents him with abundance—so far is he from being master of his fate. Verse 34 is underlined by the doom of Sodom and by the warnings of the Law, 'lest the land vomit you out, when you defile it' (Lv. :8:28). Verses 35—38 recall the idyllic prophecy of Isaiah 35 :6f. and the blessing of Deuteronomy 28:1—5, to make it doubly clear that with God poor resources become fertility and wealth. ¶These verses are, we may suppose, not merely about deserts and farmland, but

pointers to other kinds of poverty and riches, not least those of the mind and spirit. *Cf. e.g.*, the contrasts of outward and inward poverty in Revelation 2:9 and 3:17.¹⁹

107:34

107:35

107:36

107:37

107:38

107:39

107:40

107:41

107:42

107:43

Kidner

The book of Hosea closes on just such a note as this: a sober reminder not to be carried away by eloquence, in shallow response to what God has done in depth, or in purely imaginative participation in a chapter of history. It is himself that the reader is to recognize in the fourfold picture of plight and salvation, and it is the steadfastness of God that he is now to praise with new insight.²⁰

¹⁹ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 386.

²⁰ Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 387.

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BACKGROUND

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...[T]he word *gathered* (v 3) answers the very prayer of 106 :47. This matching of petition and answer has persuaded some expositors that Psalms 105—107 are a trilogy, despite the traditional boundary between Books LV and V, telling the story of God's grace in His choice and nurture of Israel (105), His forbearance and chastisement (106) and finally His reclamation of her (107). Kirkpatrick points out the link between the three in the expression *the lands*, crystallizing the promise (105:44), the punishment (106:27) and the rescue (107:3).²²

You need to recall the goodness of God in redemption/restoration, 1-3.

V 1 recalls Jeremiah 33:10, 11.

V 2 The word redeemed brings echoes of the custom which obliged a kinsman to step in to rescue his close relative from debt or slavery (see the references at 69:18).²³

There are four sections in vv 4-32

These four "life or death" situations represent four pictures of Israel's desperate plight in captivity.

Hopelessly lost and hungry, 4-9

Hopelessly imprisoned behind bars, 10-16

Hopelessly sick, 17-22

Hopelessly lost in a storm-tossed sea, 23-32

²¹ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 761.

²² Kidner, *Psalms*, pp. 383, 384

²³ Kidner, *Psalms*, pp. 383, 384

Each section has a pattern

Hopeless situation described

4-5, 10-12, 17-18, 23-27

Hopeless one cries for help

6, 13, 19, 28

God delivers because of his hesed

7, 14, 20, 29-30

People encouraged to praise because of his *hesed* and wonders.

8-9, 15-16, 21-22, 31-32.

God is the “disposer supreme²⁴” of life’s events, 33-41.

There follows a section that turns from specific instances to a general truth: the up’s and down’s, the success and the failure, the prosperity and calamity in the lives of individuals and nations are entirely in the control of and brought about by the will of the Almighty. None are brought low or raised on high unless He wills it.... Things like this do not just happen of themselves; they are proofs of the sovereign and wise providence of God. The righteous observe that such is the case and are glad over it and rejoice. In the face of this well-established truth wickedness must lapse into silence, for God governs this world effectively and well.²⁵

In the final analysis, the wicked are silenced v 42.

What should you do?

V 43 “heed and consider these things”

You were lost and hopeless in your sin.

...And often in life circumstances.

Because of no merit on your own, when you cried, God in his mercy redeemed you.

You ought OFTEN to reflect upon v 1, 8.

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

²⁴ Derek Kidner’s term, p. 386.

²⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 760, 761.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men... 8, 15, 21, and 31.

God sovereignly controls the “ebb and flow” of life, to humble the proud and exalt the humbled.

You ought to seek humility before this great God.

You ought to long to obey this great God, 105:45.