

The reason for exploring salvation (Ps 103), creation (Ps 104), covenant (Ps 105), and confession (Ps 106) is the expressed purpose of praise. Each of the four psalms begins and ends with praise. Self-exhortation, “Praise the Lord, *my soul*,” inspires a communal response of praise to the Lord. This four movement symphony of praise arouses the people of God to worship the Lord for his saving grace, his sovereign care, his covenant faithfulness, and his steadfast love and mercy.

Psalm 105 begins with a vigorous call to action. The servants of God are summoned to do the work of worship by a blitz of action verbs. All the singing, glorying, telling, seeking, and rejoicing revolves around remembering God’s wonderful works. It is not about what believers have done but what God has done and is doing. The work of remembering recalls a history of the Lord’s covenant promises beginning with Abraham and ending with Joshua. In this psalm, Israel’s rebellious and wayward ways are forgotten for a moment and only the Lord’s great faithfulness is remembered. Psalm 106 tells the other side of the story.

Remember His Wonderful Acts

*Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.
Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.*

Psalm 105:1-6

The psalmist knows that we are not primarily thinkers or believers but lovers. James K. A. Smith’s thesis is confirmed in the psalms. Real worship, the kind of worship envisioned by the psalmist, shapes and transforms our identities “by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. . . . What defines us is what we love.”¹ The call to worship given in Psalm 105 calls for action from the body up and from the head down. A string of lively imperatives call for active agents of praise and proclamation. Intense intentionality coupled with a keen sense of ultimacy characterizes the outward looking missional worship of a people looking to God. The global reach of the message is united with the intimacy of the heart seeking the Lord. The narrow minded spectator is out of place in this assembly of globally-minded worshippers bent on energetic and thoughtful praise.

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

The psalmist's first concern is for worship to be God-centered. It is the Lord whose name is proclaimed, whose deeds are made known, and whose wonderful acts are celebrated. Worship is centering because the people of God proclaim his name, sing to him, tell of his acts, glory in his holy name, and remember his wonders, his miracles, and his judgments. "In worship God gathers his people to himself as center: 'The Lord reigns' (Ps 93:1). Worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God."²

The psalmist's second concern is for worship to "make known among the nations what he has done" (Ps 105:1). The goal of worship is consistent with Yahweh's promise to Abraham ("...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" - Gen 12:3) and with Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Paul's emphasis on intelligible worship also fits the psalmist's concern ("Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will be speaking into the air" - 1 Cor 14:9).

This concern is inseparable from the first and essential if the nations are going to hear of the Lord's wonderful acts. Worship and mission form a positive, dynamic tension, each serving as an energizing and motivating catalyst for the other. Both sides of the equation work equally well. We can worship our way into mission and mission our way into worship. Mission produces a powerful incentive to worship because both mission and worship are centered in God. Worship reminds us that "mission is not ours; mission is God's." We worship the triune God who is on a mission and when we worship we are reminded, "it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission."³

The psalmist identifies the worshipers as the Lord's "servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob" (Ps 105:6). This description is good news for all those who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. In the past the Jewish identity was tied to circumcision, never to race and ritual, but now it is rooted in faith. As the apostle Paul explained, "Scripture foresaw that God would justify Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal 3:8-9). "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (Rom 2:28-29). The true children of Abraham received Christ the Messiah to the Jews and the Savior of the world.

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:26-29).

² Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 60.

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 62.

Psalm 105 covers the early chapters of our family history. For all those who in Christ this is our story, too. We are servants of the Lord, descendants of Abraham, chosen by God, and children of Jacob. Everybody has a story, but only one story redeems our story. It is the story of the one who came who was greater than Abraham, greater than Joseph, and greater than Moses.

When the psalmist told the story of salvation history only half of it could be told. Much more was yet to come. But now we have a fuller story to tell to the nations to turn their hearts to the Lord. The call of Abraham and the patriarchal journey, the story of Joseph and Egyptian bondage, the Exodus and the conquest of the promised land, are all wonderful acts of protection, provision, deliverance, guidance, and redemption. These miracles and wonders – these redemptive analogies – need to be remembered, along with all that has happened since. In the coming of Jesus Christ, in answer to all the promises and prophecies, the salvation story reached its fulfillment, not yet its culmination, but its climax, in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. If the people of God had a wonderful story to tell more than thousand years before Jesus was born, how much more do the people of God today have a story to tell. Today, we await the King with even greater reasons to worship and even greater news to share.

His Everlasting Covenant

*He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
He remembers his covenant forever,
the promises he made, for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac.
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant:
“To you I will give the land of Canaan
as the portion you will inherit.”*

Psalm 105:7-11

The psalmist declares, “He is Yahweh our God!” This is the truth around which every promise, prophecy, and purpose is centered. The Lord is no tribal deity, no ethnic god, no regional myth. His judgments are in all the earth. The Lord is the Savior of the world (Ps 103) and the Creator of the cosmos (Ps 104) and the Lord of history. The psalmist emphasizes the Lord’s *everlasting* covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in two parallel lines. “Forever” is equal to “a thousand generations.” Augustine explains that one thousand is a symbolic number, “because the solid square of the number ten, ten times ten, and this taken ten times amounts to a thousand” signifies the eternal inheritance of those who live by faith in the covenant promises of God.⁴ For the Lord

⁴ Augustine, Psalm 105, 521. In the Book of Revelation there is a threefold reference to the one thousand years of protection for the people of God (Rev 20:1-7). One thousand (10 x 10 x 10) is a figurative number for the ideal church age extending from Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension to Christ’s second coming. During that time Satan’s influence persists but his power is limited. Beale, Revelation, 995. Beale summarizes his argument: “That this is not a literal chronological number is apparent from: (1) the consistently figurative use of numbers elsewhere in the book, (2) the figurative nature of much of the immediate context (“chain,” “abyss,” “dragon,” “serpent,” “locked,” “sealed,” “beast”), (3) the predominantly figurative

to remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, means that he acts on the promise to give the land “as the portion you will inherit” (Ps 105:11). All three dimensions of the covenant, its everlastingness, its patriarchal principals, and its pledge of the land, converge when Jesus responds to the faith of the centurion, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and from the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:10-11). The promise of the land is fulfilled and transcended in the global reach of the gospel.⁵ For Augustine, “This is everlasting inheritance,”⁶ Christ’s followers have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This inheritance fulfills and transcends the covenant promises given to Israel. It is no longer tied to the land or to political autonomy.⁷ “The notion of a holy land is superseded by that of a holy community (1 Pet 2:4-10).⁸ This is the inheritance Jesus promised when he said:

“Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first”(Mark 10:29-31).

The promise of a homeland (Gen 12:1-5) is “central to understanding the plan of redemption.” Tim Keller explains, “We long for a home, a place of security, comfort, and love. We were made for a world without death or parting from love, a world in which we walked with God and knew him face to face. The world has been marred by sin and is no longer home, and we are restless exiles since our expulsion from Eden. So when the Son of God came he had no place to lay his head (Luke 9:58) and was crucified outside the city. He took the great exile we deserved so we could be brought into God’s household (Eph 2:17-19). And someday he will turn the world back into home indeed (Rev 21:1-8).”⁹

His Protection

*When they were but few in number,
few indeed, and strangers in it,*

tone of the entire book (1:1), (4) the figurative use of “1,000” in the OT [and the NT, see Deut 32:30; Joshua 23:10; Job 9:3; 33:23; Ecclesiastes 7:28; Isaiah 30:17; 2 Peter 3:8], and (5) the use in Jewish and early Christian writings of “1,000” years as a figure for the eternal blessing of the redeemed.”

⁵ The dispensational template interprets the Bible dualistically. Instead of seeing the promises to Israel fulfilled in the church and in the one new humanity created in Christ Jesus, dispensationalists argue that God has a separate destiny for Israel that involves reconstituting the nation, repatriating the land, and restoring the temple. God’s promises to ethnic Jews will be fulfilled after the church is raptured, when Israel turns to her Messiah during the great tribulation. This interpretative template calls for two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church; two different Last Days, one for Israel and one for the church; Christ’s return comes in two stages, the rapture and the second coming; and there are two final judgments, the judgment seat of Christ and the final great white throne judgment. This dualism depends on a template imposed on the Bible, rather than a straight-forward reading of the biblical text.

⁶ Augustine, Psalms 105, 522.

⁷ Webster, Outposts of Hope, 29.

⁸ Elliott, *1 Peter*, 336.

⁹ Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, 265.

*they wandered from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another.
He allowed no one to oppress them;
for their sake he rebuked kings:
“Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm.”
He called down famine on the land
and destroyed all their supplies of food;
and he sent a man before them –
Joseph, sold as a slave.
They bruised his feet with shackles,
his neck was put in irons,
till what he foretold came to pass,
till the word of the Lord proved him true.
The king sent and released him,
the ruler of peoples set him free.
He made him master of his household,
ruler over all he possessed,
To instruct his princes as he pleased
and teach his elders wisdom.*

Psalm 105:12-22

The psalmist sketches the story of Genesis from Abraham to Joseph. He compresses half the Book of Genesis and several hundred years into eleven poetic verses. But he does not fail to stress the homeless vulnerability of the patriarchs, their divine protection, and the Lord’s sovereign direction. The psalmist puts words of warning, “Do not touch,” to the invisible hand of protection that guarded these resident aliens as they wandered from nation to nation. The world called them nomads and strangers, but the Lord called them his anointed ones; his prophets. He saw them as his chosen ones and his testimony to the nations.

In tandem with calling down a famine, the Lord sends a man before them – Joseph, sold as a slave. The psalmist provides additional commentary to the Genesis account of Joseph’s journey from Canaan to Egypt. His feet and neck are shackled and he is caged like an animal until “the word of the Lord proved him true” (Ps 105:19). The sending and the suffering of Joseph, a person defined by the word of God, makes him a type pointing forward to Jesus Christ. One who the world despised, became a ruler of peoples, a master of the king’s household, and an instructor of princes. And all of this was the Lord’s doing!

His Deliverance

*Then Israel entered Egypt;
Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham.
The Lord made his people very fruitful;
he made them too numerous for their foes,*

*whose hearts he turned to hate his people,
to conspire against his servants.
He sent Moses his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
They performed his signs among them,
his wonders in the land of Ham.
He sent darkness and made the land dark –
for had they not rebelled against his words?
He turned their waters into blood,
causing their fish to die.
Their land teemed with frogs,
which went up into the bedrooms of their rulers.
He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their land;
he struck down their vines and fig trees
and shattered the trees of their country.
He spoke, and the locusts came,
grasshoppers without number;
they ate up every green thing in their land,
ate up the produce of the soil.
Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the firstfruits of all their manhood.
He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold,
and from among the tribes no one faltered.
Egypt was glad they left,
because dread of Israel had fallen on them.*

Psalm 105:23-38

Israel’s resident alien status continues with Joseph’s family fleeing to Egypt because of the famine. The psalmist’s line, “Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham,” underscores Israel’s refuge status. They came in search of food. Their future looked hopeless, but “the Lord made his people very fruitful” (Ps 105:24). First, they were pitied by the Egyptians because they were weak and vulnerable, but over time their families grew and flourished. Then, they were perceived as a threat and hated by the Egyptians. The worshiper may be surprised that the psalmist credits the sovereign Lord with both the famine and the Egyptian change of heart. The Lord turned their hearts to hate his people! The covenant people of God do not have luxury of secondary causes and second guessing. The Lord is sovereign over all. “In Israel’s historiography,” writes Patrick Reardon, “all is theology.”¹⁰ For “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

Like Joseph, Moses the Lord’s servant was *sent* along with Aaron to perform the Lord’s “signs among them” (Ps 105:27). The initiative and the action belong to the Lord. It is his *sending* that

¹⁰ Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 207.

sets these two representatives apart as types foreshadowing the coming of the sent One (John 3:34; 1 John 4:9-10). And with the sending of Moses, the Lord sent “signs” and “wonders” (plagues) among the Egyptians. The psalmist describes eight of the ten plagues, leaving out the fifth plague against the livestock and the sixth plague of boils. He begins the sequence with the ninth plague of darkness and offers this reason for the judgment: “For had they not rebelled against his [the Lord’s] words?” (Ps 105:28). The psalmist ends with the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn sons. “These two frame all of the other plagues with their significance for judgment, first on the sun god and then on Pharaoh.”¹¹

Israel did not escape Egypt through their own courage and wisdom. The Lord delivered them. The Lord “brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered” (Ps 105:37). The psalmist illustrates the completeness of the deliverance in three ways: Israel did not leave Egypt empty handed; the solidarity of Israel remained unbroken; and “the dread of Israel” fell on Egypt. The Lord’s victory was material, spiritual, and emotional.

His Faithfulness

*He spread out a cloud as a covering,
and a fire to give light at night.
They asked, and he brought them quail;
he fed them well with the bread of heaven.
He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed like a river in the desert.
For he remembered his holy promise
given to his servant Abraham.
He brought out his people with rejoicing,
his chosen ones with shouts of joy;
he gave them the lands of the nations,
and they fell heir to what others had toiled for –
that they might keep his precepts
and observe his laws.
Praise the Lord.*

Psalm 105:39-45

The psalmist has made his point, the Lord has honored his everlasting covenant with Israel and he is worthy of all praise. His protection, deliverance and faithfulness are everywhere evident in the specific details and in the grand sweep of Israel’s history. His sketch of the Israel’s trek through the wilderness and the conquest of the promised land are only briefly mentioned. The psalmist credits the Lord’s provision of food, water, and guidance to his commitment to honor his promise to Abraham. “For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham” (Ps 105:42). The psalmist doesn’t actually come out and say, “And what more shall I say? I don’t have time to tell about . . .” (Heb 11:32), but he leaves that impression. He closes with a spirited description of joyful deliverance, abundant blessing, and renewed obedience to the will of God.

¹¹ Ross, Psalms, 269.

“Remember this! He led his people out singing for joy;
his chosen people marched, singing their hearts out!
He made them a gift of the country they entered,
helped them seize the wealth of the nations
So they could do everything he told them –
could follow his instructions to the letter.
Hallelujah!”

Psalm 105:43-45 The Message