

October 17 Lesson 7 (NIV)

## PRAISE GOD FOR PAST DELIVERANCE

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Psalm 107:33–43

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 107

### PSALM 107:1–9, 39–43

- <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.
- <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—  
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,  
<sup>3</sup> those he gathered from the lands,  
from east and west, from north and south.
- <sup>4</sup> Some wandered in desert wastelands,  
finding no way to a city where they could settle.
- <sup>5</sup> They were hungry and thirsty,  
and their lives ebbed away.
- <sup>6</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.
- <sup>7</sup> He led them by a straight way  
to a city where they could settle.
- <sup>8</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for mankind,  
<sup>9</sup> for he satisfies the thirsty  
and fills the hungry with good things.
- .....
- <sup>39</sup> Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled  
by oppression, calamity and sorrow;  
<sup>40</sup> he who pours contempt on nobles  
made them wander in a trackless waste.
- <sup>41</sup> But he lifted the needy out of their affliction  
and increased their families like flocks.
- <sup>42</sup> The upright see and rejoice,  
but all the wicked shut their mouths.
- <sup>43</sup> Let the one who is wise heed these things  
and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

## KEY TEXT

*They cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.—Psalm 107:6*

## CELEBRATING GOD

### Unit 2: Called to Praise God

LESSONS 5–9

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Thinking and Thanking
- B. Lesson Context
- I. God of the Redeemed (Psalm 107:1–9)
  - A. Summons to Praise (v. 1)
  - B. Reasons for Praise (vv. 2–3)  
*Redeemed*
  - C. Time of Despair (vv. 4–5)
  - D. Time of Deliverance (vv. 6–9)  
*Whose Credit?*
- II. God of Reversals (Psalm 107:39–43)
  - A. Humbling the Mighty (vv. 39–40)
  - B. Honoring the Meek (v. 41)
  - C. Heartening the Wise (vv. 42–43)

### Conclusion

- A. Continue to Praise
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

AsaphAy-saff.

AssyrianUh-sear-e-un.

BabylonianBab-ih-low-nee-un.

DeuteronomyDue-ter-ahn-uh-me.

EzraEz-ruh.

Herod Agrippa Hair-ud Uh-grip-puh.

Isaiah Eye-zay-uh.

Jeremiah Jair-uh-my-uh.

Nebuchadnezzar Neb-yuh-kud-*nez*-er.

peonage pea-uh-nij.

Pharaoh Fair-o or Fay-roe.

Sennacherib Sen-nack-er-ib.

## Introduction

### A. Thinking and Thanking

A hymn for congregational singing was supposed to be listed in the church bulletin as “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come.” But the word *Thankful* was misspelled and printed as *Thinkful*. Most of us are quite familiar with the bulletins we are handed as we enter a Sunday morning service. Typos may seem fewer these days because of computer spell-check features used to prepare bulletins. In the previous era, however, uncorrected typos could make for “interesting” reading!

When the minister noticed the error, he was not at all bothered or upset. Instead, he used the mistake to point out that thinking and thanking go hand in hand. A thankful person is “thinkfull”; such an individual is always mindful of the good things God provides daily. Ungrateful people, by contrast, tend to be those who are so caught up in the busyness of life that they do not stop to consider the role that gratitude should play in their lives. The thinking person will follow the admonition of Scripture to “remember the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:18) and to “forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). Thinking will be followed by thanking.

The ancient book of Psalms has much to teach us yet in this regard.

### B. Lesson Context

Psalm 107 opens Book V, which consists of chapters 107–150 (see Lesson Contexts of lessons 5 and 9). In its transitional role, Psalm 107 also wraps up a series of longer psalms, namely Psalms 104–106. These highlight the mighty works of God in the world he created (Psalm 104) and on behalf of his people through the centuries (105; 106). The latter includes various circumstances of great need through which the Lord had shown himself able to come to the rescue of those in distress (also 107). Psalms in this group are specific in affirming the greatness of the Lord and the wonders that demonstrate that greatness (examples: 104:1, 24; 105:2, 5; 106:2). A repeated refrain in Psalm 107 serves the same purpose (107:8, 15, 21, 31; see commentary on verse 8 below).

None of the psalms in this subgroup are attributed to a specific author. However, evidence within the psalms themselves suggests that they were written following the exiles' return from Babylon. The earliest possible writing then would be about 538 BC.

Lesson 5 spoke briefly of poetic parallelism, and some students see a certain parallelism in Psalm 107 in this manner (numerals are verse numbers):

Introduction: Call to Praise (1–3)

	<u>Stanza One</u>	<u>Stanza Two</u>	<u>Stanza Three</u>	<u>Stanza Four</u>
Situation (A <sup>1</sup> ):	4–5	10–12	17–18	23–27
Despair (B <sup>1</sup> ):	6a	13a	19a	28a
Rescue (C):	6b–7	13b–14	19b–20	28b–30
Thanks (B <sup>2</sup> ):	8	15	21	31
Situation (A <sup>2</sup> ):	9	16	22	32

Recap (33–42)

Conclusion: Call to Praise (43)

The saving actions attributed to God in Psalm 107 should be considered in light of the covenant God established with the nation of Israel. That covenant promised what he would do in response both to the people's obedience and disobedience. Blessings such as agricultural abundance and respect from surrounding nations would follow obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1–14). But curses such as disease, famine, and subjugation by enemies would come if the people abandoned the Lord for other gods (28:15–68).

## I. God of the Redeemed (PSALM 107:1–9)

### A. Summons to Praise (v. 1)

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

This call to worship is found several places in the Old Testament (see 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalms 106:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1). Variations of it are also noteworthy (see 1 Chronicles 16:41; Ezra 3:11; Psalms 30:4; 92:1; etc.). The text before us is in the imperative—the people must *give thanks to the Lord!* At other times, the idea summarizes the tasks of those who carried out the various daily duties associated with the people's worship (example: 1 Chronicles 16:37–42).

The theme of this verse was expressed earlier in Israel's history when the ark of the covenant was brought into the temple at Jerusalem following its completion (2 Chronicles 5:13) and again when the temple was dedicated (7:3).

This may imply that a psalm David had given to Asaph previously is a background to Psalm 107 (1 Chronicles 16:7–8). The same may be true of the song in Ezra 3:10–11, when the

foundation of the second temple was dedicated by those who had traveled to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon.

Within the Old Testament, the phrase *his love endures forever*—the reason for giving thanks—is found numerous times. Psalm 136 is especially notable in this regard.

## **B. Reasons for Praise (vv. 2–3)**

### **2. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,**

Christians often think of being *redeemed* as primarily spiritual in nature, something especially accomplished by Jesus (Ephesians 1:7). But redemption in earthly terms has a long history in Israel. The formative story of the exodus from Egypt is the account of God’s redeeming the Hebrew slaves from their bondage (Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Psalm 106:9–10). The book of Ruth shows redemption in action on a smaller scale (Ruth 2:1; 4:1–6).

The redeemed come out of their dire situations because of God’s intercession. This is obvious in the exodus example; in Ruth’s case, God’s work came long before, in the form of laws that gave her the opportunity to be redeemed by a relative of her dead husband. The exiles who returned from Babylon experienced God’s restoration on a grand scale.

In these and all other situations, those who have been redeemed by *the Lord* must *tell their story*—that is, they must bear witness to that fact. How could the nation be a light to all peoples (Isaiah 42:6) if they never told about the wonderful things God had done for them? Those who have been redeemed *from the hand of the foe*—any enemy—by God’s intercession must give him the credit.

### **3. those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.**

Reading the curses in Deuteronomy 28:15–68, we notice that some of the same language is in our passage. These include being *gathered* from captivity in Psalm 107:2–3; and words such as “oppression,” “calamity,” and “sorrow” in 107:39 fit the circumstances described in the curses. The Lord had promised that his people would go into exile if they refused to obey him (example: Deuteronomy 28:64). But he also promised that if the people would return to him in their captivity, he would “gather [them] again from all the nations where he scattered [them]” (30:3).

Here the promised deliverance is celebrated; the Lord has indeed gathered his people from the four cardinal directions, bringing them home from exile (compare Isaiah 49:12). This reversal accomplishes what a previous psalm had hoped for (see Psalm 105:44). To this we can compare the future gathering of all God’s redeemed (Luke 13:29–30).

## **C. Time of Despair (vv. 4–5)**

### **4a. Some wandered in desert wastelands,**

The reference to wandering *in desert wastelands* brings to mind the Israelites’ 40-year punishment for failing to trust the Lord following the exodus of 1447 BC (Numbers 14:30–35). The immediate context in Psalm 107 should also remind the reader of the plight and peril of the journey into Babylonian exile of 586 BC. The words *desert* and *wastelands* are also translated

“wilderness” in the Old Testament (see Psalms 78:40; 106:14). These synonyms serve to strengthen the image of desolation and hopelessness.

**4b. finding no way to a city where they could settle.**

No matter where they wandered, the people had found *no way to a city where they could settle* for refuge and permanency in terms of the 40-year punishment. During the later exile to Babylon, they traveled until their captors told them they had reached their destination (compare Psalm 137:1).

**5. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.**

When one has insufficient food and water, the impact is more than just physical. The results are felt deep within; despondency and hopelessness soon characterize one’s very life.

**D. Time of Deliverance (vv. 6–9)**

**6. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.**

The turning point for those in *trouble* and *distress* wasn’t the Lord’s deliverance—the turning point was repentance. The people’s cry *to the Lord* was one of faith that accompanied such change of heart (compare Ezekiel 14:6). The word *delivered* echoes the concept of redemption found in Psalm 107:2.

**7. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.**

The people’s wandering (Psalm 107:4, above) was replaced by a clear direction from the Lord. Whereas before they had nowhere to put down roots, they found *a city where they could settle*, perhaps a reference to returning to Jerusalem (compare and contrast Hebrews 11).

Of course, Jerusalem needed a lot of work before it was safe again, let alone functional (see Ezra 1:2–4; Nehemiah 2:5, 17). But if the Lord could bring them back to the city, he could certainly ensure that it was rebuilt and habitable (Ezra 6:13–18; Nehemiah 6:15).

**8. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind,**

The experiences recorded in the previous two verses are just a sample of countless examples of the Lord’s *unfailing love*. The Lord’s *wonderful deeds* are not and never have been limited to one generation or period of history.

**9. for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.**

Older translations of the Bible have “longing” in place of *thirsty*, evoking a dire need for water. The verse before us recalls the lack of food and water described in Psalm 107:5, above. Lack was replaced with adequate means of sustaining life.

The message of the verse is clear: the Lord is willing and able to reverse peoples’ circumstances (compare Nehemiah 1:9). Jesus’ ministry was full of examples of his acting on behalf of suffering people (Matthew 4:23–25; etc). And in the first-century church, we see quite a surprising reversal: the acceptance of Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Acts 10:44–48; etc).

## II. God of Reversals (PSALM 107:39–43)

### A. Humbling the Mighty (vv. 39–40)

**39. Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow;**

Psalm 107:33–38 (not in today’s lesson text) further recounts the Lord’s reversals of distress to blessing; see also the stanza layout in the Lesson Context. It is he who can bring about or allow a fruitful land to become barren as punishment for wickedness, which might manifest as spiritual apathy or outright idolatry (compare Psalm 107:33–34; Haggai 1:1–11).

Those who had once flourished under God’s blessing didn’t seem to learn the lessons of previous generations. So a cycle of *oppression, calamity, and sorrow* would begin anew; this is a major theme of the book of Judges. Though Israelite numbers had increased (see Psalm 107:38, not in our lesson text), disobedience resulted in their population being *decreased*.

It’s tempting to do an in-depth study of the three words *oppression, calamity, and sorrow* individually to try to get at what specifically was involved with each one. But such an approach runs the danger of missing the bigger picture of the cumulative effect of those three (compare the same cumulative effect of “sword,” “famine,” and “plague” in Jeremiah 14:12 and numerous other passages).

Reversals of life situations as seen throughout Psalm 107 served God’s disciplinary purposes. But they were not his desire. What he desired all along was obedience. The sharpest examples of this discipline are the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (2 Kings 17:6–23 and 2 Chronicles 36:15–21, respectively).

**40. he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste.**

*Nobles*, referring to the royal line of rulers, are not exempt by their status from God’s discipline (Luke 1:52). Humbling of the powerful and mighty is demonstrated throughout Scripture: consider Pharaoh (Exodus 14), Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:20–37), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4), and Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:20–23).

### B. Honoring the Meek (v. 41)

**41. But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks.**

The humbling of nobles (above) stands in sharp contrast to the Lord’s lifting of *the needy*. This language brings to mind the reversals described in the prayers of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:5–8) and Mary (Luke 1:46–55). In both Old and New Testaments, God’s people celebrated his concern for the downtrodden. Though “Mary’s Song” is usually considered during the Christmas season, we can and should celebrate by remembering her trust throughout the year: “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors” (Luke 1:54–55).

### C. Heartening the Wise (vv. 42–43)

**42. The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.**

*The upright* are those who follow the Lord's ways and view people and situations as he does (examples: Genesis 6:9; 15:6; Deuteronomy 6:25). Such people *see* the series of circumstances described in the previous verses and *rejoice* to see such reversals take place (see expanded expression in Psalm 97:10–12). They know that these circumstances have not happened as the result of mere chance or luck. The Lord is the true ruler of the world, and he can reverse people's situations. *The wicked* are left speechless (compare Romans 3:19).

**43. Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.**

Wise people get that way as they *heed* the *things* described in the previous verses and see in them manifestations of *the loving deeds of the Lord*. The Hebrew word translated as "loving deeds" is repeated throughout the psalm, a form of the word translated "love" in Psalm 107:1 and "unfailing love" in 107:8, 15, 21, 31. This indicates an obvious theme throughout Psalm 107, as the chapter is bookended with an emphasis on God's love and loving deeds.

Some of the Lord's actions described in this psalm (such as pouring contempt on nobles in 107:40, above) may not seem very loving. But they reflect a system of corrective justice and judgment that a loving, caring God set in motion to uphold his principles of righteous conduct. Human beings are not left to wonder what God's standards are. As Moses declared in Deuteronomy 29:29,

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

God's love is demonstrated to all people (Matthew 5:45). But the wise have a greater understanding of and gratitude for how much God's loving deeds impact daily life.

## Conclusion

### A. Continue to Praise

God's consistently loving deeds and provision of care for those who faithfully honor and serve him must not be overlooked. Jesus spoke of blessings provided for those who seek first "[God's] kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). That must be tempered, however, by the awareness that even in times when such provisions are lacking, God's presence and grace have not been denied to the faithful. This too is consistently taught in Scripture (examples: 2 Corinthians 9:10–11; 12:7–10; Philippians 4:15–19).

God can and does still bring to pass the reversals found within this psalm, such as providing relief for the hungry (Psalm 107:9) and delivering the poor from their poverty (107:41). These are times to celebrate! But gratitude to God is *always* meant to be part of our spiritual demeanor (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It is not to hinge on whether material needs (or wants!) are supplied. The physical side of life does indeed matter, but it is not the only dimension of reality. Paul expressed the tension clearly: "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16; compare Philippians 2:7–11).

For Christians, there is always the most important reason for giving thanks: our redemption in Jesus (Colossians 1:12–14; 1 Peter 1:3–5). Hope in our future resurrection gives us reason both to celebrate the work Jesus did on the cross and the work the Spirit continues to do in our lives, preparing us for an eternity of praise to God.



### **B. Prayer**

Father, we thank you for the record in Scripture of your power to deliver your people. Help us, we pray, to deepen our understanding of your love toward us and model your ways to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

We can never praise the Lord too much!<sup>1</sup>

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