
PSALM 107: 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever.

A thanksgiving of the people for deliverance from difficulties and dangers; their state compared to a journey through a frightful wilderness, Psa 107:1-9; to confinement in a dreary dungeon, Psa 107:10-16; to a dangerous malady, Psa 107:17-22; to a tempest at sea, Psa 107:23-32. The psalmist calls on men to praise God for the merciful dispensations of his providence, in giving rain and fruitful seasons, after affliction by drought and famine, Psa 107:33-38; for supporting the poor in affliction, and bringing down the oppressors, Psa 107:39-41. The use which the righteous should make of these providences, Psa 107:42; and the advantage to be derived from a due consideration of God's merciful providence, Psa 107:43.

This Psalm has no title, either in the Hebrew, or any of the Versions; the word "Hallelujah," which is prefixed to some of the latter, is no title, but was most probably borrowed from the conclusion of the preceding Psalm. The author is unknown; but it was probably like Psalms 105 and 106, made and sung at the dedication of the second temple. The three Psalms seem to be on the same subject. In them the author has comprised the marvellous acts of the Lord towards his people; the transgressions of this people against God; the captivities and miseries they endured in consequence; and finally God's merciful kindness to them in their restoration from captivity, and re-establishment in their own land.

This Psalm seems to have been sung in parts: the Psa 107:8, Psa 107:15, Psa 107:21, and Psa 107:31, with the Psa 107:6, Psa 107:13, Psa 107:19, and Psa 107:28, forming what may be called the burden of the song. In singing of which the whole chorus joined.

We may easily perceive that the Psalm must have been sung in alternate parts, having a double burden, or intercalary verse often recurring, and another immediately following, giving a reason for the former. See the Psa 107:8 and Psa 107:9, the Psa 107:15 and Psa 107:16, the Psa 107:21 and Psa 107:22, the Psa 107:31 and Psa 107:32, and the Psa 107:42 and Psa 107:43, which may be reckoned under the same denomination. Dr. Lowth, in his 29th prelection, has made some excellent remarks on this Psalm. "It is observable," says he, "that after each of the intercalary verses one is added, expressive of deliverance or praise. I would farther observe, that if the Psalm be supposed to be made with a view to the alternate response of one side of the choir to the other, then it may be considered as if it were written exactly after the method of the ancient pastorals, where, be the subject of their verse what it will, each swain endeavors to excel the other; and one may perceive their thoughts and expressions gradually to arise upon each other; and hence a manifest beauty may be discovered in this Divine pastoral. We will suppose, then, that the author composed it for the use of his brethren the Jews, when, in the joy of their hearts, they were assembled after their return from captivity. At such a time, what theme could be so proper for the subject of his poem, as the manifest goodness of Almighty God? The first performers, therefore, invite the whole nation to praise God for this; a great instance of it being their late return from captivity. At Psa 107:10, the other side take the subject, and rightly observe that the return of their great men, who were actually in chains, was a more remarkable instance of God's mercy to them, than the return of the people in general, who were only dispersed, we may suppose, up and down the open country. Then the first performers beautifully compare this unexpected deliverance to that which God sometimes vouchsafes to the languishing dying man, when he recalls, as it were, the sentence of death, and restores him to his former vigor. The others again compare it, with still greater strength and

expression, to God's delivering the affrighted mariner from all the dreadful horrors of the ungovernable and arbitrary ocean. But the first, still resolved to outdo the rest, recur to that series of wonderful works which God had vouchsafed to their nation, Psa 107:32, and of which they had so lately such a convincing proof. Wherefore at last, as in a common chorus, they all conclude with exhorting each other to a serious consideration of these things, and to make a proper return to Almighty God for them. "No doubt the composition of this Psalm is admirable throughout; and the descriptive part of it adds at least its share of beauty to the whole; but what is most to be admired is its conciseness, and withal the expressiveness of the diction, which strikes the imagination with inimitable elegance. The weary and bewildered traveler, the miserable captive in the hideous dungeon, the sick and dying man, the seaman foundering in a storm, are described in so affecting a manner, that they far exceed any thing of the kind, though never so much labored." I may add that had such an Idyl appeared in Theocritus or Virgil, or had it been found as a scene in any of the Greek tragedians, even in Aeschylus himself, it would have been praised up to the heavens, and probably been produced as their master-piece.

Verse 1

O give thanks - Here is a duty prescribed; and the reasons of it are immediately laid down.

1. He is good. This is his nature.
2. His mercy endureth for ever.

This is the stream that flows from the fountain of his goodness.

PSALM 107: 2 Let the redeemed by the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the adversary,

Verse 2

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so - For they have had the fullest proof of this goodness, in being saved by the continuing stream of his mercy.

PSALM 107: 3 And gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Verse 3

And gathered them out of the lands - Though many Jews returned into Jerusalem from various parts of the world, under the reigns of Darius Hystaspes, Artaxerxes, and Alexander the Great; yet this prophecy has its completion only under the Gospel, when all the ends of the earth hear the salvation of God.

PSALM 107: 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way. They found no city to live in.

Verse 4

They wandered in the wilderness - Here begins the Finest comparison: the Israelites in captivity are compared to a traveler in a dreary, uninhabited, and barren desert, spent with hunger and thirst, as well as by the fatigues of the journey, Psa 107:5.

PSALM 107: 5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.

PSALM 107: 6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses,

Verse 6

Then they cried unto the Lord - When the Israelites began to pray heartily, and the eyes of all the tribes were as the eyes of one man turned unto the Lord, then he delivered them out of their distresses.

PSALM 107: 7 he led them also by a straight way, that they might go to a city to live in.

Verse 7

That they might go to a city of habitation - God stirred up the heart of Cyrus to give them liberty to return to their own land: and Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, at different times, brought many of them back to Judea.

PSALM 107: 8 Let them praise the LORD for his loving kindness, for his wonderful works to the children of men!

Verse 8

O that men would praise the Lord - This is what is called the intercalary verse, or burden of each part of this responsive song: see the introduction. God should be praised because he is good. We naturally speak highly of those who are eminent. God is infinitely excellent, and should be celebrated for his perfections. But he does wonders for the children of men; and, therefore, men should praise the Lord. And he is the more to be praised, because these wonders, נִפְלְאוֹת niphlaoth, miracles of mercy and grace, are done for the undeserving. They are done לְבְנֵי אָדָם libney adam, for the children of Adam, the corrupt descendants of a rebel father.

PSALM 107: 9 For he satisfies the longing soul. He fills the hungry soul with good.

Verse 9

For he satisfieth the longing soul - This is the reason which the psalmist gives for the duty of thankfulness which he prescribes. The longing soul, נפש שוקקה nephesh shokekah, the soul that pushes forward in eager desire after salvation.

PSALM 107: 10 Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,

Verse 10

Such as sit in darkness - Here begins the Second similitude, which he uses to illustrate the state of the captives in Babylon viz., that of a prisoner in a dreary dungeon.

1. They sit in or inhabit darkness. They have no light, no peace, no prosperity.
 2. "In the shadow of death." The place where death reigns, over which he has projected his shadow; those against whom the sentence of death has been pronounced.
 3. They are bound in this darkness, have no liberty to revisit the light, and cannot escape from their executioners.
 4. They are afflicted, not only by want and privation in general, but they are tortured in the prison, עני oni, afflicted, humbled, distressed.
 5. Their fetters are such as they cannot break; they are iron. The reason of their being in this wretched state is given.
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PSALM 107: 11 because they rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of the Most High.

Verse 11

Because they rebelled against the words of God -

1. God showed them their duty and their interest, and commanded them to obey his word; but they cast off all subjection to his authority, acted as if they were independent of heaven and earth, and broke out into open rebellion against him.
 2. He counseled and exhorted them to return to him: but they contemned his advice, and turned his counsel into ridicule.
 3. As lenient means were ineffectual, he visited them in judgment: hence it is added,
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PSALM 107: 12 Therefore he brought down their heart with labour. They fell down, and there was no one to help.

Verse 12

He brought down their heart with labor - He delivered them into the hands of their enemies. and, as they would not be under subjection to God, he delivered them into slavery to wicked men: "So they fell down, and there was none to help;" God had forsaken them because they had forsaken him.

PSALM 107: 13 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

Verse 13

Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble - This was the salutary effect which their afflictions produced: they began to cry to God for mercy and help; and God mercifully heard their prayer, and reversed their state; for,

PSALM 107: 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke away their chains.

Verse 14

He brought them out of darkness -

1. Gave them again peace and prosperity.
 2. Repealed the sentence of death.
 3. "Unbound the poor prisoners."
 4. Broke their iron bonds in sunder.
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PSALM 107: 15 Let them praise the LORD for his loving kindness, for his wonderful works to the children of men!

Verse 15

O that men, etc. - This is the intercalary verse, or burden, of the second part, as it was of the first. See Psa 107:8.

PSALM 107: 16 For he has broken the gates of brass, and cut through bars of iron.

Verse 16

For he hath broken - This is the reason given for thanks to God for his deliverance of the captives. It was not a simple deliverance; it was done so as to manifest the irresistible power of God. He tore the prison in pieces, and cut the bars of iron asunder.

PSALM 107: 17 Fools are afflicted because of their disobedience, and because of their iniquities.

Verse 17

Fools because of their transgression - This is the Third comparison; the captivity being compared to a person in a dangerous malady. Our Version does not express this clause well: Fools מדרך פשעם midderech pisham, because of the way of their transgressions, are afflicted. Most human maladies are the fruits of sin; misery and sin are married together in bonds that can never be broken.

PSALM 107: 18 Their soul abhors all kinds of food. They draw near to the gates of death.

Verse 18

Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat - A natural description of a sick man: appetite is gone, and all desire for food fails; nutriment is no longer necessary, for death has seized upon the whole frame. See a similar image, Job 33:20 (note).

PSALM 107: 19 Then they cry to the LORD in their trouble, he saves them out of their distresses.

Verse 19

Then they cry - The effect produced by affliction as before.

PSALM 107: 20 He sends his word, and heals them, and delivers them from their graves.

Verse 20

He sent his word, and healed them - He spoke: "Be thou clean, be thou whole;" and immediately the disease departed; and thus they were delivered from the destructions that awaited them.

PSALM 107: 21 Let them praise the LORD for his loving kindness, for his wonderful works to the children of men!

Verse 21

O that men, etc. - The intercalary verse, or burden, as before.

PSALM 107: 22 Let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with singing.

Verse 22

And let them sacrifice - For their healing they should bring a sacrifice; and they should offer the life of the innocent animal unto God, as he has spared their lives; and let them thus confess that God has spared them when they deserved to die; and let them declare also "his works with rejoicing;" for who will not rejoice when he is delivered from death?

PSALM 107: 23 Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters;

Verse 23

They that go down to the sea in ships - This is the Fourth comparison. Their captivity was as dangerous and alarming as a dreadful tempest at sea to a weather-beaten mariner.

PSALM 107: 24 These see the LORD's works, and his wonders in the deep.

Verse 24

These see the works of the Lord - Splendid, Divinely impressive, and glorious in fine weather.
His wonders in the deep - Awfully terrible in a tempest.

PSALM 107: 25 For he commands, and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up its waves.

Verse 25

For he commandeth - And what less than the command of God can raise up such winds as seem to heave old Ocean from his bed?

PSALM 107: 26 They mount up to the sky; they go down again to the depths. Their soul melts away because of trouble.

Verse 26

They mount up to the heaven - This is a most natural and striking description of the state of a ship at sea in a storm: when the sea appears to run mountains high, and the vessel seems for a moment to stand on the sharp ridge of one most stupendous, with a valley of a frightful depth between it and a similar mountain, which appears to be flying in the midst of heaven, that it may submerge the hapless bark, when she descends into the valley of death below. This is a sight the most terrific that can be imagined: nor can any man conceive or form an adequate idea of it, who has not himself been at sea in such a storm.

Their soul is melted because of trouble - This is not less expressive than it is descriptive. The action of raising the vessel to the clouds, and precipitating her into the abyss, seems to dissolve the very soul: the whole mind seems to melt away, so that neither feeling, reflection, nor impression remains, nothing but the apprehension of inevitable destruction! When the ship is buffeted between conflicting waves, which threaten either to tear her asunder or crush her together; when she reels to and fro, and staggers like a drunken man, not being able to hold any certain course; when sails and masts are an incumbrance, and the helm of no use; when all hope of safety is taken away; and when the experienced captain, the skillful pilot, and the hardy sailors, cry out, with a voice more terrible than the cry of fire at midnight, We are All lost! we are all Lost! then, indeed, are they at their wit's end; or, as the inimitable original expresses it, וְחַל חִכְמָתָם תִּתְבַּלֵּעַ vechol chochmatham tithballa, "and all their skill is swallowed up," - seems to be gulped down by the frightful abyss into which the ship is about to be precipitated. Then, indeed, can the hand of God alone "bring them out of their distresses." Then, a cry to the Almighty (and in such circumstances it is few that can lift up such a cry) is the only means that can be used to save the perishing wreck! Reader, dost thou ask why I paint thus, and from whose authority I describe? I answer: Not from any books describing storms, tempests, and shipwrecks; not from the relations of shipwrecked marines; not from viewing from the shore a tempest at sea, and seeing a vessel beat to pieces, and all its crew, one excepted, perish. Descriptions of this kind I have read, with the shipwrecked mariner I have conversed, the last scene mentioned above I have witnessed: but none of these could give the fearful impressions, the tremendous and soul-melting apprehensions, described above. "Where then have you had them?" I answer, From the great deep. I have been at sea in the storm, and in the circumstances I describe; and, having cried to the Lord in my trouble, I am spared to describe the storm, and recount the tale of his mercy. None but either a man inspired by God, who, in describing, will show things as they are, or one who has been actually in these circumstances, can tell you with what propriety the psalmist speaks, or utter the thousandth part of the dangers and fearful apprehensions of those concerned in a tempest at sea, where all the winds of heaven seem collected to urge an already crazy vessel among the most tremendous rocks upon a lee shore! God save the reader from such circumstances!

When, in the visitation of the winds, He takes the ruffian billows by the top, Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them, With deafening clamours, on the slippery clouds, That with the hurly death itself awakes! Henry IV.

A storm at sea - the lifting the vessel to the clouds - her sinking into the vast marine valleys - the melting of the soul - and being at their wit's end, are well touched by several of the ancient poets. See particularly Virgil's description of the storm that dispersed the fleet of Aeneas, who was himself not unacquainted with the dangers of the sea: -

Tollimur in coelum curvato gurgite, et idem

Subducta ad manes imos descendimus unda.

Aen. iii., 364.

Now on a towering arch of waves we rise,
Heaved on the bounding billows to the skies.
Then, as the roaring surge retreating fell,
We shoot down headlong to the gates of hell.

Pitt.

Rector in incerto est, nec quid fugiatve, petatve,

Invenit: ambiguis ars stupet ipsa malis. "The pilot himself is in doubt what danger to shun; or whither to steer for safety he knows not: his skill is nonplussed by the choice of the difficulties before him."

See more in the analysis.

PSALM 107: 27 They reel back and forth, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

PSALM 107: 28 Then they cry to the LORD in their trouble, and he brings them out of their distress.

PSALM 107: 29 He makes the storm a calm, so that its waves are still.

Verse 29

He maketh the storm a calm - He causes the storm to stand dumb, and hushes the waves. See the original, where sense and sound emphatically meet: - יקם ויחשו לדממה סארה יקם galleyhem vaiyecheshu lidemamah searah yakem He shall cause the whirlwind to stand dumb, and he shall hush their billows.

PSALM 107: 30 Then they are glad because it is calm, so he brings them to their desired haven.

Verse 30

Then are they glad because they be quiet - The turbulence of the sea being hushed, and the waves still, they rejoice to see an end to the tempest; and thus, having fine weather, a smooth sea, and fair wind, they are speedily brought to the desired haven.

PSALM 107: 31 Let them praise the LORD for his loving kindness, for his wonderful works for the children of men!

Verse 31

O that men - The intercalary verse, or burden, as before. See Psa 107:8.

PSALM 107: 32 Let them exalt him also in the assembly of the people, and praise him in the seat of the elders.

Verse 32

Let them exalt him also in the congregation - Their deliverance from such imminent danger, and in a way which clearly showed the Divine interposition, demands, not only gratitude of heart and the song of praise at the end of the storm, but when they come to shore that they publicly acknowledge it in the congregation of God's people. I have been often pleased, when in sea-port towns, to see and hear notes sent to the minister from pious sailors, returning thanks to the Almighty for preservation from shipwreck, and, in general, from the dangers of the sea; and for bringing them back in safety to their own port. Thus "they exalt the Lord in the congregation, and praise him in the assembly of the elders." And is it not something of this kind that the psalmist requires?

PSALM 107: 33 He turns rivers into a desert, water springs into a thirsty ground,

Verse 33

He turneth rivers into a wilderness - After having, as above, illustrated the state of the Jews in their captivity, and the deliverance which God wrought for them, he now turns to the general conduct of God in reference to the poor and needy; and his gracious Interpositions in their behalf, the providential supply of their wants, and his opposition to their oppressors. On account of the wickedness of men, he sometimes changes a fruitful land into a desert. See the general state of Egypt in the present time: once a fertile land; now an arid, sandy wilderness. Again, by his blessing on honest industry, he has changed deserts into highly fertile ground. And, as for the wickedness of their inhabitants, many lands are cursed and rendered barren; so, when a people acknowledge him in all their ways, he blesses their toil, gives them rain and fruitful seasons, and fills their hearts with joy and gladness.

PSALM 107: 34 and a fruitful land into a salt waste, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it.

PSALM 107: 35 He turns a desert into a pool of water, and a dry land into water springs.

PSALM 107: 36 There he makes the hungry live, that they may prepare a city to live in,

Verse 36

And there he maketh the hungry to dwell - All this seems to apply admirably to the first colonists of any place. They flee from a land of want, an ingrata terra that did not repay their toil, and they seek the wilderness where the land wants only cultivation to make it produce all the necessaries of life. He, by his providence, so guides their steps as to lead them to rivers which they can navigate, and from which they can procure plenty of fish, and shows them wells or springs which they have not digged. The hungry dwell there; and jointly agree, for convenience and defense, to build them a city for habitation. They sow the fields which they have cleared; and plant vineyards, and orchards which

yield them in creasing fruits, Psa 107:37, and he multiplies their cattle greatly, and does not suffer them to decrease, Psa 107:38. What a fine picture is this of the first peopling and planting of America, and of the multiplication and extension of that people; of the Divine blessing on their industry, and the general and astonishing prosperity of their country! May they never again know what is spoken in the following verse:

PSALM 107: 37 sow fields, plant vineyards, and reap the fruits of increase.

PSALM 107: 38 He blesses them also, so that they are multiplied greatly. He doesn't allow their livestock to decrease.

PSALM 107: 39 Again, they are diminished and bowed down through oppression, trouble, and sorrow.

Verse 39

Again, they are minished - Sometimes by war, or pestilence, or famine. How minished and brought low was the country already spoken of, by the long and destructive war which began in 1775, and was not ended till 1783! And what desolations, minishings, and ruin have been brought on the fertile empires of Europe by the war which commenced in 1792, and did not end till 1814! And how many millions of lives have been sacrificed in it, and souls sent unprepared into the eternal world! When God makes inquisition for blood, on whose heads will he find the blood of these slaughtered millions? Alas! O, alas!

PSALM 107: 40 He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in a trackless waste.

Verse 40

He poureth contempt upon princes - How many have lately been raised from nothing, and set upon thrones! And how many have been cast down from thrones, and reduced to nothing! And where are now those mighty troublers of the earth? On both sides they are in general gone to give an account of themselves to God. And what an account!

Where there is no way - Who can consider the fate of the late emperor of the French, Napoleon, without seeing the hand of God in his downfall! All the powers of Europe were leagued against him in vain, they were as stubble to his bow. "He came, He saw, and He conquered" almost every where, till God, by a Russian Frost, destroyed his tens of thousands of veteran troops. And afterwards his armies of raw conscripts would have over-matched the world had not a particular providence intervened at Waterloo, when all the skill and valor of his opponents had been nearly reduced to nothing. How terrible art thou, O Lord, in thy judgments! Thou art fearful in praises, doing wonders.

The dreary rock of St. Helena, where there was no way, saw a period to the mighty conqueror, who had strode over all the countries of Europe!

PSALM 107: 41 Yet he lifts the needy out of their affliction, and increases their families like a flock.

 Verse 41

Yet setteth he the poor on high - This probably refers to the case of the Israelites and their restoration from captivity. But these are incidents which frequently occur, and mark the superintendence of a benign Providence, and the hand of a just God; and are applicable to a multitude of cases.

PSALM 107: 42 The upright will see it, and be glad. All the wicked will shut their mouths.

Verse 42

The righteous shall see it - The wicked are as inconsiderate as they are obstinate and headstrong.

And rejoice - To have such ample proofs that God ruleth in the earth, and that none that trust in him shall be desolate.

All iniquity shall stop her mouth - God's judgments and mercies are so evident, and so distinctly marked, that atheism, infidelity, and irreligion are confounded, and the cause of error and falsehood has become hopeless. It was only the mouth that could do any thing; and that only by lies, calumnies, and blasphemies: but God closes this mouth, pours contempt upon the head and judgment upon the heart. This may also be applied to the case of the Israelites and the Babylonians. The former, when they turned to God, became righteous; the latter were a personification of all iniquity.

PSALM 107: 43 Whoever is wise will pay attention to these things. They will consider the loving kindnesses of the LORD.

Verse 43

Whoso is wise - That is, He that is wise, he that fears God, and regards the operation of his hand will observe - lay up and keep, these things. He will hide them in his heart, that he sin not against Jehovah. He will encourage himself in the Lord, because he finds that he is a never-failing spring of goodness to the righteous.

They shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord - יהוה חסדו chasdey Jehovah, the exuberant goodness of Jehovah. This is his peculiar and most prominent characteristic among men; for "judgment is his strange work." What a wonderful discourse on Divine Providence, and God's management of the world, does this inimitable Psalm contain! The ignorant cannot read it without profit; and by the study of it, the wise man will become yet wiser.