

Psalm 105 “Abraham’s Seed”
Psalm 105
Galatians 3

January 14, 2018

Psalm 105 retells the story of salvation from Abraham to Joshua.
Psalms 105 and 106 cover much of the same ground –
but they are very different in nature.
Psalm 105 is the good parts version – you might say –
there is no reference to Israel’s sin or grumbling.

The focus of Psalm 105 is on what *God* has done.
notice the relentless use of the third person singular:
“He is the LORD... He remembers his covenant...He sent Moses...”

These longer “story-Psalms” can sometimes be daunting to sing!
The tune may be new for some of you –
so I would encourage you to use the first couple stanzas to get used to the tune.
But then settle in – and focus on the words!
We are singing the story of the gospel – the good news of how God delivered his people!

Sing Psalm 105
Read Galatians 3

In Galatians 3, Paul highlights a particular grammatical feature called the collective singular.
It works in English – just like in Greek.
The word “seed” is a collective singular.
When I ask “where is my seed?” does that mean *one* seed or many seeds.
“Offspring” works the same way.
If I say, my offspring is sitting over there –
do I mean one particular child – or all seven?!

Paul says that the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring –
Not to *offsprings* – as though many – but to offspring – referring to *one* – even Christ.

In other words, *all of God’s promises* to Abraham and his seed
find their true and proper fulfillment in Christ.

Now, this is also why we read to the end of the chapter!
Because Paul recognizes that “offspring” can be – and should be –
taken in *both* the singular and the plural senses!
So in verse 29 he says, “and if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring,
heirs according to promise.”

But *we* are only heirs – we are only offspring –
because we have been baptized into Christ *who is the seed of Abraham!*

We only become the offspring of Abraham in and through Christ
who is the *singular* seed of Abraham.

In this way, Paul is reflecting on what Psalm 105 had been saying.

Psalms 104, 105, and 106 conclude Book Four of the Psalter with a historical trilogy
that retells the story of Israel from Creation to New Creation.

Last week we looked at Psalm 104 as a song about Creation and Temple –
how the original Creation was designed as a temple –
a dwelling place for God with his people.

This week we look at the story from Abraham to Moses –
from the call of Abraham to the Exodus from Egypt.

Psalm 105 makes it very clear that we should understand the Exodus
in terms of God's promise to Abraham.

The introduction to the Psalm in verses 1-6 commands us to do three things:
First – declare his wondrous works by singing praise to him (v1-2)
Second – seek him by glorying in his holy name (v3-4)
And third – remember his wondrous works as the offspring of Abraham (v5-6).

Introduction: A Call to Praise – Remember His Wondrous Works (v1-6)

*Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!*

² *Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!*

Notice that in verses 1-2, worship and evangelism are blended together.

Give thanks to the LORD – or confess the LORD –
whenever we recite the Creed we are confessing the mighty deeds of God.

But this is not merely an act of worship.

It is also an act of evangelism:

“make known his deeds among the peoples!”

Evangelism simply means “proclaiming the good news.”

And as Psalm 105 shows very clearly,

the “good news” is not a system of ethics –

the “good news” is not how to have your best life now.

The good news is the wondrous works of God!

And so we sing to him – we sing praises to him –

and in those songs we “tell of all his wondrous works.”

It may sound strange to modern ears,
but when you were singing Psalm 105,
you were doing evangelism!
You were proclaiming the gospel among the peoples.

But if you think about it, Psalm 105 is being sung in the temple –
and very few Gentiles would ever hear it!
But there is a confidence here that through Israel’s worship,
the good news will spread.

I think about what we have seen in China over the years.
In China, Chinese nationals are not allowed to visit international churches.
So many of the foreign Christians in China –
who think of their primary work as “evangelism” –
tend to have a pretty low view of the worshipping assembly.
After all, if we can’t invite our Chinese friends,
then what’s the point?!

But even if your Chinese friends never come to church with you,
they will still see the *effect* – they will see the *fruits* of your worship –
as they see a life that is shaped and ordered around the Good News of the gospel.

And I’m not just talking about living a good ethical life!
Your *words* as well as your *deeds* will be shaped by the Gospel that you confess.

(And since the beginning of a Psalm is often connected to the end of a Psalm,
I would point out that this focus on worship and evangelism
is not disconnected from ethics.
After all, God gave his people the land
“that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws.” v45
But Psalm 105 wants us to see the proper order:
first, God *saves* his people –
and brings them into the promised inheritance –
then they live the way that he commands.
Salvation belongs to the Lord!)

But you are not living under the restrictive government of China!
I would encourage you to invite your friends to church.
Paul talks about outsiders – or unbelievers – coming into the worshipping assembly
and being convicted by the prophesying (by the preaching) [1 Cor 14:25]

But then the second part of the introduction calls us to glory in his holy name –
and to *seek* the LORD and his strength and presence.

³ *Glory in his holy name;*

let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!
⁴ *Seek the LORD and his strength;*
seek his presence continually!

Seeking the LORD is a term used often to describe Israel's worship.
In the story that Psalm 105 retells
we hear about the *power* of God's holy name.
God had placed his name upon them –
just as he has placed his holy name upon *you* in your baptism!

So seek the LORD and his strength.
Seek his presence *continually* –
which Paul paraphrases as “pray without ceasing.”
We are called to *pursue* God –
to be relentless in our seeking of the LORD!

How often are we slack in our pursuit of God?
Half-hearted in our prayers –
double-minded as we pursue our pleasures *alongside* our God?

So how do we go about seeking his presence?
One key way that we do this
is by *remembering*:

⁵ *Remember the wondrous works that he has done,*
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
⁶ *O offspring of Abraham, his servant,*
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!

Notice that there are two parts of this remembering:
one is the remembering of God's wondrous works, his miracles, and his judgments;
the other is by remembering who *we* are –
offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

Throughout the scriptures, remembering and forgetting are bound up with *worship*.
In Deuteronomy 6-11, Israel is called over and over to *remember* the LORD –
do not forget the LORD, by going and worshiping other gods.
In the 4th commandment, God says “Remember the Sabbath day...”
At the Lord's Table, Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me...”

In each case, remembering is more than just an intellectual act.
When you remember the LORD and his mighty deeds – his wondrous works –
you are remembering how he brought you out of slavery to sin and death –
how he made you his child and gave you a new home.
And even in the OT, “offspring of Abraham” was not merely a biological term!

Rahab, Naaman, and Uriah the Hittite were not descended from Abraham.
Ruth and Caleb were not descended from Jacob –
and yet all of these became children of God by faith.

After all, *everyone* becomes a child of God by *adoption*.
Yes, the Jews have a special privilege of having been adopted *first*.
But they are no more “natural” children than anyone else!
The only one who is a *natural* son, is the eternal Son of God.
He alone is a Son of God by nature!

But having said that,
the adoption of Abraham is *really important!*
Because in the adoption of Abraham – in the adoption of Israel –
God began to reveal his plan for the salvation of the human race!

The rest of the Psalm recounts the initial revelation of that plan of salvation –
from Abraham to Joshua.

Part 1 (verses 7-24) deal with the LORD’s faithfulness to the Fathers,
from Abraham to Joseph.

1. The LORD’s Faithfulness to the Fathers (v7-24)

a. The Covenant with Abraham – and the Everlasting Inheritance (v7-11)

⁷ *He is the LORD our God;*
his judgments are in all the earth.

Verse 7 continues the twin themes of Israel and the nations.

He is the LORD *our* God –
his judgments are in *all* the earth.

His purposes are centered on Israel – but through Israel his judgments – his decrees –
come to all the earth.

And you see the beginning of this in Abraham:

⁸ *He remembers his covenant forever,*
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
⁹ *the covenant that he made with Abraham,*
his sworn promise to Isaac,
¹⁰ *which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,*
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
¹¹ *saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan*
as your portion for an inheritance.”

People sometimes wonder why God takes so long to fulfill his promises.

Abraham lived 4,000 years ago – Jesus was raised from the dead 2,000 years ago –
and yet we still await the final fulfillment of God’s covenant.

But Psalm 105 reminds us that God commanded his word for a thousand generations!
I'm not a stickler for *literal* interpretations of biblical numbers,
but it is worth pointing out that a thousand generations
would be something like 25-40,000 years.
We are only 100-120 generations removed from Abraham's day.
(That's kind of mind-blowing when you think about it...
Some of our hundredth-great grandparents were alive in Abraham's day!)

So we *could be* another 20,000 years away from the return of Christ!
(Of course, since we do not need to take numbers literally,
a thousand generations *could* just mean *forever!*)

But the point is that God remembers his covenant forever.
The covenant with Abraham – his sworn promise to Isaac –
which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.

In Genesis, God's promise included three things:
The Land, and the Seed, and the Blessing to the Nations.

And while the focus *here* is on the Promised Land – the land of Canaan –
you can see echoes of the other two as well.
After all, this Psalm speaks to Israel – to the Offspring of Abraham –
and it keeps making connections to the nations.

Most of book 4 has been making connections between Moses and David and the Exile.
Many of these Psalms have also included themes of Creation –
especially Psalm 104 – as we saw last week.
But Psalm 105 is one of only *two* Psalms that refers directly to Abraham (Psalm 47).
It is the only Psalm that refers to Isaac.
And while other Psalms refer to the Jacob and Joseph to speak of the tribes of Israel,
Psalm 105 is the only one that talks about them by name.

In other words, Psalm 105 is one of the first theological reflections on *covenant*.
How should we understand the relationship between the covenants –
the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Israel (through Moses),
and the covenant with David?
Psalm 89 had asked, where is God's steadfast love to David?
Will God forget David?

Psalm 105 is part of the answer here at the end of Book 4.
No, God will not forget David!
But if you want to understand what God is doing –
then you have to go back – before the time of Moses –
and remember what the Mosaic covenant was doing in the first place!

The God whose judgments are in *all* the earth –
is the God who remembers his covenant with Abraham.
He gave the Promised Land to Israel *because that's what he promised to Abraham!*

So if you would understand what God is doing in history –
pay attention to what God does for Abraham!

b. God's Protection for Abraham (v12-15)

¹² *When they were few in number,
of little account, and sojourners in it,
wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
saying, "Touch not my anointed ones,
do my prophets no harm!"*

So in verses 12-15, he describes God's provision for the patriarchs.

When they were few in number – when they were sojourners –
God protected them.

Verse 15 paraphrases Genesis 20:6-7,
when God spoke to king Abimelech – warning him not to sleep with Sarah –
because “the man [Abraham] is a prophet.”

And I would point out – for your sake –
that if you are *Abraham's offspring* – as Paul says –
then God's promise to Abraham is true for *you* as well!
Those who bless you will be blessed.
Those who curse you will be cursed.

God will protect his own!

And you see this most emphatically in the story of Joseph in verses 16-24:

c. The Famine and Deliverance through Joseph (v16-24)

¹⁶ *When he summoned a famine on the land
and broke all supply^[a] of bread,
he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.*

It is important to say that *God* summoned the famine and broke the supply of bread.

But with the trial – with the affliction –

God also provided the way of escape.

In this case, God had sent Joseph ahead of his brothers to Egypt.

The betrayal by his brothers is left out here –

after all, Psalm 105 spends very little time talking about man's sin!

The focus here is on what *God has done* for our salvation!

As Joseph himself said to his brothers:

You intended it for evil – but God meant it for good.

God does not merely “react” and say,

“oh, let’s see, how can I make this work out for good??”

No, God’s eternal purpose lies at the root of all things.

It may take years – it may take generations – before his purposes are revealed! –
but he will do it!!

That doesn’t excuse Joseph’s brothers!

They were *wrong* to sell their brother into slavery!

The fact that God is sovereign does not mean that God approves of evil!

Rather, it means that God works all things together for good –
in the end!

Romans 8:28 says that God works all things together for good,
for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This is one of the most *misused* verses in the Bible!

I have often heard it used to say –

‘hey, that really horrific thing that happened to you wasn’t really that bad!’

‘Buck up, everything will be fine.’

But don’t just stop at Romans 8:28.

What does Romans 8:29 say?

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined
to be conformed to the image of his Son,
in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
And those whom he predestined he also called,
and those whom he called he also justified,
and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

In other words, working all things together for good
is not saying that horrific things aren’t really, really bad!

Rather, working all things together for good
is something that can *only be seen properly*
in the light of eternity –
both in the light of God’s eternal purpose (predestination)
and in the light of our eternal glorification at the last day!

While we seek to live out the expression of God’s kingdom in this age –
there are some things that will only be made right at the final judgment.

And indeed, the story of Joseph is a microcosm of this.

He prefigures our Lord Jesus Christ as he passed through suffering to kingdom glory!

¹⁸ *His feet were hurt with fetters;
his neck was put in a collar of iron;*
¹⁹ *until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD tested him.*

The word of the LORD tested him!

He was a slave in Potiphar's house –
then after being falsely accused of sexual harassment by Potiphar's wife,
he was thrown in prison.
But the word of the LORD tested him – refined him – purified him.

²⁰ *The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free;*
²¹ *he made him lord of his house
and ruler of all his possessions,*
²² *to bind^[b] his princes at his pleasure
and to teach his elders wisdom.*

Joseph became a ruler of Egypt.

Psalm 105 weaves together Divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
We have seen that God is the one *acting* in history.
And yet the king – Pharaoh – sets Joseph free and makes him lord of all his house.
And we see Joseph governing Pharaoh's princes and elders – teaching them wisdom.

Already, Abraham's great-grandson has begun to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations!

²³ *Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.*
²⁴ *And the LORD made his people very fruitful
and made them stronger than their foes.*

But even as verses 23-24 conclude the faithfulness of God to the Fathers,
it also begins to foreshadow what comes next.
Yes, the LORD made his people fruitful –
he made them stronger than their foes...

Wait – what? – foes?

Not only did *Joseph* face opposition and suffering –
but that becomes the paradigm for God's way –
the way of the cross.

2. The LORD's Faithfulness to Israel (v25-45a)

a. He Sent Moses to Do His Signs – the Plagues (v25-38)

²⁵ *He turned their hearts to hate his people,*

to deal craftily with his servants.

Verse 25 again uses strong language:

“he turned their hearts to hate his people”

We need to be clear here:

Psalm 105 is *not* saying that the Egyptians were kind, wonderful, loving people who would have treated Israel with such great affection – if only God hadn’t “turned their hearts to hate his people”!
Rather, Psalm 105 is saying that God rules over all of history.

You cannot say that God is only God of the “good parts.”

God raised up Egypt in order for them to be an example of the final judgment.

He did not “force them” to do anything contrary to what they wanted to do – but his purpose was to demonstrate his mighty deeds – and so he raised up Pharaoh – and all Egypt – so that his judgments might be made known in all the earth.

And you see this is the recounting of the plagues in verses 26-36.

- ²⁶ *He sent Moses, his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.*
- ²⁷ *They performed his signs among them
and miracles in the land of Ham.*
- ²⁸ *He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they did not rebel^[c] against his words.*
- ²⁹ *He turned their waters into blood
and caused their fish to die.*
- ³⁰ *Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.*
- ³¹ *He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.*
- ³² *He gave them hail for rain,
and fiery lightning bolts through their land.*
- ³³ *He struck down their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.*
- ³⁴ *He spoke, and the locusts came,
young locusts without number,*
- ³⁵ *which devoured all the vegetation in their land
and ate up the fruit of their ground.*
- ³⁶ *He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the firstfruits of all their strength.*

But why did he send Moses and Aaron?

Well, what has been driving this whole song?

God's promise to Abraham!

The plagues of Egypt were given as a type and foreshadowing of the final judgment.

The promise to Abraham included the land, the seed, and the blessing to the nations.

Or more precisely, the promise that those who bless you will be blessed,

and those who curse you will be cursed –

and *all nations* will be blessed through your seed.

In Joseph's day, there was a Pharaoh who *blessed* the seed of Abraham –

when he handed over his kingdom to Joseph!

That Pharaoh was blessed.

But then there arose a Pharaoh who did *not* remember Joseph –

and he *curse*d the Seed of Abraham –

thereby bringing a curse upon all Egypt!

And as we saw when we went through Exodus recently,

there is a sort of “poetic justice” in the final plague of Egypt.

After all, Pharaoh had ordered the murder of the baby boys of Israel.

And in reply, the LORD says to Pharaoh,

Israel is my son, my firstborn – let my son go that he may serve me –

but if not, then I will kill *your* firstborn! (Ex. 4:22-23)

But when Israel left Egypt,

they plundered the Egyptians –

the Egyptians willingly gave all sorts of gifts

if only Israel would make haste and *leave!*

³⁷ *Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold,
and there was none among his tribes who stumbled.*

³⁸ *Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.*

Once again, God is faithful.

He does all that he has promised!

b. He Provided for Them in the Wilderness (v39-41)

³⁹ *He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.*

⁴⁰ *They asked, and he brought quail,
and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.*

⁴¹ *He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.*

Verses 39-41 then give a rather rosy picture of what life was like in the wilderness!

Verse 39 reminds us of the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night –

the quail and the manna – which all they had to do was *ask* and it was granted!

You might want to argue that Israel was *actually* grumbling and murmuring – not just “they asked...”!

But God was merciful to his poor, helpless, servants!
Or perhaps better, to his little helpless, children!
They had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years.
400 years where God had been mostly silent!

All the way from the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai (Exodus 14-20),
every time that Israel grumbles,
the LORD hears them and gives them what they want!
Perhaps the better way of saying it is that they grumble –
but *no one dies!*

God is a gracious and merciful Father –
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love!

He *knows* when we are weak and frail –
and no, we’re not praying the way we *should* –
but *his Spirit* intercedes for us with groans beyond words!

Next week, we’ll hear about how God handles *rebellion!*
But Psalm 105 is about how God cares for his helpless children!
He cares for us – protects us – feeds us!

NOT because we are such wonderful people!

c. He Remembered His Holy Promise to Abraham (v42-43)

⁴² *For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.*

God did not hear Israel because they were so good and holy and righteous.
No, he heard them – first and foremost – because
he remembered his holy promise!
And second, because he remembered Abraham his servant.

The order is important.
Why does God *act* to save his people?
For his *own name’s sake*.
Nothing outside of God is a worthy end – a worthy reason for doing something!
God works his mighty deeds because he remembers his holy promise.

But of course, he has made his holy promise *to Abraham* – to Isaac and to Jacob.

And if Psalm 89 is still in the background –
(and yes, it is!!) –

then Psalm 105 is also saying that God *will be* faithful to his promises to David.

Notice then the results of God's mighty deeds!

⁴³ *So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.*

This undoubtedly refers to Exodus 15 – the Song of the Sea.
When God delivers his people, we sing for joy!

But *because he had promised*,
there is more that God does:

d. So He Gave Them the Land That They Might Keep His Statutes (v44-45a)

⁴⁴ *And he gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil,*
⁴⁵ *that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.*

Israel is my son, my firstborn.
Let my son go, that he may worship (serve) me.

To be the son of God is to reflect our heavenly Father.
Being the son of God is being the image of God.

But of course, we don't reflect God very well...
Psalm 105 sounds so optimistic and hopeful!
It's almost like Israel, the Son of God – the Offspring of Abraham –
is about to succeed where all their fathers had failed!

That's why we read Galatians 3.
Because it is *true*.
There is a good reason why Psalm 105 is so optimistic and hopeful
about the Seed of Abraham!

But as Paul goes on to say in Galatians 4,
“But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,
born of woman, born under the law,
to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as sons.
And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
crying, ‘Abba! Father!’
So you are no longer a slave, but a son,
and if a son, then an heir through God.”

In other words, Paul sees the whole of the history of the people of God

as a history of the Son of God.

Israel in the wilderness was like the son of God in his terrible twos!
Israel in the era of the Kings is like a teenage rebellion!

But Jesus is the Son of God who *grows up* – who matures –
and who enters his inheritance!

That is why he *alone* is the Seed of Abraham (singular) –
and it is only *in him* that we become fellow heirs by faith.

Conclusion: Praise the LORD (v45b)

Praise the LORD!