

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)

The Psalms of a Nation Restored

Readings: *Psalm 107, 116, 118, 125*

Reflections:

- Psalm 107 is a testimony to the grace and love of God. “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.” The overarching story of God reveals the incredible mercy, humility and grace of God. Like this psalm, the telling and living of the story of God is the revelation of his incredible love. This psalm walks through four different experiences of Israel (walking in the desert, being held as slaves in chains, being sick and almost dying, facing the forces of nature in the storms of the seas) and how in each case they approached death but God in his love rescued them. God is revealed as the “creating me a home, chain-breaking, healing, all powerful” God who saves those whose hearts are right before him. The ultimate symbols of security, having a safe city of their own with bountiful crops and growing families, are all the rewards of those who receive the blessing of God. And who are these? The upright, specifically the upright of heart. The big problem for Israel from day one is that although God offered the physical promise of blessings as described in this psalm, no matter how great the reward, Israel, as with all people, are shown over and over again to need a heart transformation. They are not upright and so they continue to experience the effects of a broken relationship with God.
- Psalms 116 is really a personalized psalm of Psalm 107. It retells the story of God’s love and mercy from an individual’s point of view. “The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple hearted (or humble); when I was in great need he rescued me.” This again is the clear understanding of the meaning of the story. God’s great love is the main point of the revelation of who he is. The psalmist, after encountering God’s love, not his judgment, becomes loyal to God and desires to be faithful. This reminds us that the experience of lavish grace, not fear of severe punishment, fosters a loyal heart.
- Psalm 118 praises God’s great love and mercy, both corporately and personally. Here are some key verses: “His love endures forever;” “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid (the presence of God’s divine love casts out fear). ...The Lord is with me; he is my helper.” “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man;” “The Lord is my

strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” All of these reflect the kind of trust-based relationship that God desires and the kind of exchange of love that God intends for those that are his people. The reference to the temple’s completion captures a key phrase that is symbolic both of Israel and her coming Messiah, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.” God’s way is to take the weak, the broken, the apparently useless and rejected and transform them into the most exalted. This reveals the humility and glory of God. Like the rejected stone, both Christ and his followers are rejected by other people but are exalted to the right hand of God (see Ephesians 1:10-2:15).

- Psalm 125 is a simple song of affirmation of the basic truth that those who trust in God are secure. Again the basis of that trust relationship is a matter of the heart. “Do good O Lord to those who are good, to those who are upright of heart.” This recurrent theme reminds the singer or reader that it is not enough to try to do good things. A person must be good and for this to be true, your heart must be changed from the inside out.

