

The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Chapter 2 – The Community Psalm of Narrative Praise (CP)

INTRODUCTION

- Community Psalm of Narrative Praise (CP)
- CP Psalms: 106, 124, 129

“Despite many individual differences, one common characteristic of all community laments is their cry for deliverance from trouble. But when God broke his silence and came to the aid of the people, when he reversed their trouble and brought deliverance, then his deed had to awaken the jubilation of those who had been liberated, the praise of those who had been saved” (47).

- Narrative praise versus descriptive praise
 - Narrative praise: the echo of a specific act of God which has just taken place
 - Descriptive praise: they praise God in the fullness of his existence and activity
- Why are there so few Community Psalms of Narrative Praise?
 - “This type of praise, which narrates God’s deeds, had great significance throughout Israel’s entire history, but has barely been transmitted to us in the Psalter. The most compelling reason for this is that the present collection is postexilic. In the postexilic era the people of Israel as a nation no longer experienced such acts of deliverance as are referred to in Ps. 106:12” (47).

DESCRIPTION OF THE CP

- CP in other books (48)
 - Oldest community psalm of narrative praise: Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:1-21)
 - “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown in to the sea” (Ex. 15:21).
 - This is the psalm of narrative praise in simplest form
- Expanded form of CP (48)
 - Found in Psalms 124 and 129
 - Small excerpts of CP are found in other psalms
 - Psalm 66:8-12
 - Psalm 81:6-7
 - Psalm 85:1-3
 - Psalm 93:3-4
 - Psalm 126:2-3
 - See also other texts
 - Deuteronomy 32:43
 - Isaiah 25:1-5; 26:13-19
 - Luke 1:68-75

- The song of victory (49)
 - “This celebrates Yahweh’s victories, praising God as the one who gave victory to Israel” (49).
 - No songs of victory found in the Psalter, most likely because after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 and the Babylonian exile Israel no longer experienced any victories for centuries.
 - “The songs of victory—no matter how strange this seems to us—were also originally worship songs. They had their fixed place in the conduct of the war of Yahweh, the holy war which began with consulting Yahweh for an oracle and ended with a song that praised Yahweh’s deed” (49).

- God’s epiphany (49-50)
 - The description of God’s appearance which shakes heaven and earth, when he comes to help his people (See Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 18:7-15; 68:7-8)
 - Often connected to the event of the Red Sea

AN EXAMPLE OF CP: Psalm 106

- Verses 1-3
 - Opening praise
 - Thematic question (v. 2)

- Verses 4-5
 - The plea for God to remember
 - Longing for God to save/deliver his people

- Verses 6-39
 - The people remember the times they sinned against God
 - Rebelled by the Red Sea (v. 7)
 - Craving in the wilderness (v. 14)
 - Opposed Moses and Aaron (v. 16)
 - Golden calf (v. 19)
 - No faith in the promise (v. 24)
 - Baal of Peor (v. 28)
 - Waters of Meribah (v. 32)
 - Did not destroy the peoples (v. 34)

- Verses 40-43
 - God is angry with his people
 - Punishment and deliverance many times

- Verses 44-46
 - God remembered his covenant
 - He did not let his people be destroyed

- Verses 47-48

- The people plea for God to gather them from exile (cf. verse 4-5)
- Final blessing even though they are in exile

REVIEW OF CL AND CP

- Why is that, of the psalms we've discussed so far, none of these Psalms is prominent in the Christian tradition?
 - “These psalms are all the direct or indirect echo of what happened to Israel as a people among peoples in the days of its political heights and depths. This could not be transferred to the history of Christ's church in a direct manner” (50).
- However, when we read the CL and CP psalms, we understand the foundation of all of the psalms. The events that Israel experienced formed their worship. The CL and CP psalms affect all of the other psalms we will study.
- Just as Israel experienced God and events and responded in worship, so also we experience God and events and should respond in worship. We can learn a lot from the Israelites.