

Reading on the Fifth Book of Psalms Psalms 107-150

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the themes of God's mercy and Israel's restoration as depicted in the Fifth Book of Psalms, emphasizing the prophetic nature of the texts and their implications for both Israel and Christians today.

Scripture: Psalm 107:1, Psalm 108:1-2, Psalm 111:6, Psalm 118:1, Psalm 136:1, Psalm 139:14, Psalm 145:9, Psalm 146:1-2, Psalm 147:3, Psalm 150:6

Topics: "God's Mercy", "Redemption and Restoration"

Description

John Nelson Darby explores the Fifth Book of Psalms, emphasizing God's enduring mercy amidst Israel's struggles and failures after their return to the land. He highlights the significance of the ark being brought back to Zion by David, which marked a restoration of worship and a reminder of God's sovereign grace. The Psalms recount Israel's vicissitudes, their cries for help, and God's faithfulness, culminating in the proclamation that 'His mercy endureth for ever.' Darby connects the themes of redemption, divine judgment, and the exaltation of Christ, illustrating how these Psalms reflect both Israel's history and prophetic future. Ultimately, he underscores the importance of recognizing God's mercy as a constant in the face of adversity.

Transcript

This is a kind of supplementary book which unfolds to us the ways and dealings of God when Israel is brought back.

It begins by recounting the vicissitudes of their return, and their being sunk down again, after having got into the land; but coupled with this, there is the testimony that God's mercy endureth for ever. This really began with the ark being brought to Zion by David. Ichabod had been written on Israel when the ark was taken captive, but when David brought it back, he set the people to sing, "His mercy endureth for ever"; that is to say, God's sovereign grace was above all the failure on man's part. And this characterises the last book of the Psalms. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south." In the first three verses of Psalm 107, mercy has risen up over judgment. And the same ground is taken in Psalm 108. After being brought back to the land, they are still in trouble, hungry, etc., and, in verse 39, they are again minished and brought low. We find the same thing in Isaiah 18; in the midst of judgments Israel is brought back, and then the beasts winter and the fowls summer upon them. Still, they

have got back, and they sing and give thanks.

Ques. Do you mean before antichrist's era?

Well, yes. Look at Isaiah 18: "Woe to the land shadowing with wings," etc., which sends ambassadors to bring them back; the inhabitants of the earth are called upon to give attention, and then, in verse 5, "Afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning-hooks, and take away and cut down the branches." There was a sprouting out to fill the land with fruit, but all is cut down. "In that time shall the present be brought," etc. (v. 7). Though they are brought back to the land, their troubles are not finally over.

Ques. Do you think the fifth book of Psalms refers to the whole period from the time of their coming into the land?

201 Yes; but with this special testimony, that "His mercy endureth for ever."

They are settled in the land, but they find oppressors are there, too.

Psalms 109 speaks of Christ, and of Judas also, the son of perdition, with the full power of evil and of the antichristian period; and then, in Psalm 110, the secret of it all is, that Christ is exalted, for Jehovah has said to Him, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." In Psalm 108, God claims the land as His own, saying, "I will divide Shechem and mete out the valley of Succoth." And

Psalm 111 praises Jehovah for this.

That for which Israel is waiting, is made plain in verse 6 of Psalm 111: "He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen."

Psalm 112 gives the character of those who are to be blessed-the righteous.

Going back to Psalm 108, we see the state of things in which God is asserting His rights; then, in Psalm 109, we find the man of perdition, and the moral elements of the last days. In Psalm 110, Christ is exalted i.e., prophetically; and in Psalm 111, we have the works of the LORD. In Psalm 112, as already said, it is the character of the man that gets the blessing, and then, in Psalm 113, Jehovah is to be exalted. After man has altogether failed, He comes in, in power, and He makes a "barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children.

In Psalm 114, Jehovah is exalted.

In Psalm 115, praise is given to the name of Jehovah, in contrast with idols, for the blessing of Israel.

In Psalm 116, he cries, and in the extreme of his distress he is heard, for his affliction has only driven him to Jehovah.

Ques. Is this Christ personally?

No; though He did so. And now he will come and pay his vows (v. 18).

Psalm 117 contains a summons to the nations to come and praise Jehovah; the "truth of the LORD" is seen in His faithfulness to Israel in spite of their failures. Then, once again, in Psalm 118, we have, "His mercy endureth for ever." This is remarkable, for this Psalm celebrates the whole of God's dealings; first,

in verses 10-12, the power of man is seen as altogether hostile, and that is overcome; then, in verse 13, there is the adversary, but the LORD helps him, and becomes his salvation. Verse 18 gives another aspect; it is the chastening of Jehovah, though not as giving him over unto death. All men are against him; then there is the adversary, and Jehovah chastens him; and next, we have a reference to Christ, "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner"; in verse 25, we have what the little children said, "Hosanna," etc.; and then follows what the Lord quoted when He said that they should not see Him again till they were ready to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD."

202 It is thus a kind of summary, mercy being the foundation, whilst, if adversaries oppress, the LORD helps. The adversary may thrust sore at him, but the LORD helps him. It is, really, the chastening of the LORD.

Ques. What is the day in verse 24?

The millennial day, the true sabbath of Israel, that has come; and so the night is past.

Ques. Does verse 18 refer exclusively to Israel?

It refers to all Israel. The Lord does not come in here, though He took part in it. "The stone" is, of course, Christ, but I was referring to the chastening which comes upon Israel.

Psalm 119 speaks of the writing of the law on their hearts: "I have gone astray," and so on. Many words are used, but it is every way the law, and it will be under the new covenant. In the Hebrew, each verse of each section begins with the letter it is under. That is the artistic structure of this Psalm. A portion of the Lamentations of Jeremiah is similarly arranged.

Now we come to the Songs of Degrees. They describe the process through which the nation of Israel passes in going back to the land until they reach the full blessing of unity. They begin thus: "In my distress I cried unto the LORD"; and they end with, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Having reached this point, then we have, "Ye . . . which by night stand in the house of the LORD."

It may be either a procession toward the temple, or not, but the meaning is clear; beginning with the cry of distress, there is progress leading up to the full blessing of the LORD in His temple. Psalm 134 is the last of these Songs of Degrees.

Ques. Why do we get one such as Psalm 130?

203 Because they have to go through that experience when they are back in the land.

Psalm 132 is most striking; it is David and all his afflictions; he makes known his requests, and in each case, the answer surpasses the request.

"Arise, O LORD, into thy rest," is answered by, "This is my rest for ever."

"Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness," is answered by, "I will also clothe her priests with salvation."

"Let thy saints shout for joy," is answered by, "Her saints shall shout aloud for joy."

"Turn not away the face of thine anointed," by, "I will make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish."

There is also this difference, that whereas, in Numbers 10:35, Moses says, "Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee, flee before thee," here, it is, "Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou and the ark of thy strength." And when the ark rested, Moses says, "Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel"; but here, it is "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

Psalms 135 continues with praise to Jehovah and a reference to Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 32. In the former passage, it is the Name He takes to stand by Israel for ever, and in the latter, He gives a prophecy shewing that their spot is not the spot of His children (v. 5); and then, after He has traced all their sorrows, He repents Himself for His servants (v. 36).

He rehearses thus their history, and then, in verse 13, we read: "Thy Name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations." So that, in spite of their wickedness, God carries out the original promise in fulfilment of these two passages.

Psalms 136, consequently, takes up every one of these things, adding each time, "His mercy endureth for ever." Psalm 137 introduces Babylon, which we have not had at all before this. The captivity of Babylon lasts on really to the time of the Beast. The Babylonish captivity in itself was complete, although it lingered on in the three other Beasts. The return of the Remnant is doubtless a figure of the deliverance of the nation in the last days.

204 Ques. Why is Edom connected with Babylon?

We learn this from the prophecy of Obadiah, where the character of Edom was one of perpetual hatred and hostility to Israel.

So the character of the Roman Beast comes out at the end. Babylon goes on also to the end. Here, it is the captivity of Israel when not owned of God. When they are delivered, Babylon has to be destroyed in another sense, because it is corrupt religionism.

In Psalm 138, in spite of this corrupt religion, for he is still taking up Babylon in spirit, he praises Jehovah before the gods. And notice this, too, that "in the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

In the presence of these false gods, that is, of the power of the devil, we find here two great principles: the word of God, and crying to God. Just as in Hebrews; it is the word that searches the thoughts and intents of the heart; and then we have the priesthood of Christ. So, too, in the end of Luke 10, Mary chooses that good part, and then, in the beginning of chapter 11, we have prayer; these two elements are found there: "sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

In Psalm 139, the Spirit of God is going very far for Israel, and it searches out the flesh, too. Although Israel will be restored in flesh, yet the Spirit of God searches out the flesh, and looks also at creation as God's handiwork. God searches everything, and with that, the Psalmist owns, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made"; he sees he is God's handiwork, and then he can ask to be searched out. It is thus a very instructive Psalm for us. "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" etc. I cannot get out of God's hand, and I cannot stand before His presence; then comes this: "Search me, . . . try me." It is real grace looking at us. Of course, it is natural creation that the Psalm is speaking of, because the new creation was not

then revealed.

Ques. Is there any direct allusion to the church in verse 16: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written," etc.?

It is not a direct allusion to it. He is speaking of creation-his mother's womb. It is curious how, in the Old Testament, the earth is dealt with as the mother's womb. Job does so when he says, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." It seems like nonsense at first sight; but it is just looking at us as framed of dust and going back to it, a mother's womb being, in a kind of way, the instrument of it.

205 Man comes out of the dust, and at death he goes back to dust.

Ques. What are God's thoughts, in verse 17?

God's purposes towards Israel. His thoughts towards us, are the heavenly places.

In Psalm 140, he finds himself in the presence of the evil man, and looks for deliverance.

All this refers to the Remnant, and so it does throughout the Psalms, with, here and there, some positive prophecy about Christ.

In Psalm 141, he is looking for deliverance, and to be kept, heart and lips, and that his prayer may come before God. But he is still in great distress: "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth." And then he cries to the LORD. He has gone through all, and brings them back practically until they get delivered.

There is a special character belonging to Psalm 142: "I cried unto the LORD with my voice." Not only was his heart groaning, but he expresses himself openly to God. There is in his supplication a contention with Jehovah, "I cried unto thee, Jehovah; I said, Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

In Psalm 143, he is still in full distress, crying and praying to be delivered from his enemies.

It is very striking, the way in which the power of evil is rampant all through. It is so with us, in a certain sense. When God giveth songs to His people, this supposes evil to be in power. And the Psalms suppose the time of antichrist. Not until the Lord actually comes will the Beast and antichrist be destroyed. In these last Psalms, it is more the general condition. The Man of sin comes before the Assyrian, although they are both found together. But the Assyrian will be destroyed after the Man of sin. By that time, the Lord will have come and destroyed the Beast, and also the false Prophet or the Man of sin; and when all this power of sin has gone, then the Assyrian comes up. Western Europe and Russia will be found fighting without owning the Lord in it, and they will both be destroyed like sheaves in the floor; Micah 4:12. See also Isaiah 35 and 63. The Lord then takes possession of His throne at Jerusalem, and the Assyrian, when he comes up for the last time, will find the Lord there, and will be destroyed.

206 In Daniel 11:45, it should read: "Between the sea and the mountain of holy beauty" he pitches his camp, i.e., between the Mediterranean Sea and Jerusalem. The king of the North is the Assyrian. If Gog and Magog refer to the nations to be left for the millennium, they come up over all the earth.

Ques. Is there anything in the Old Testament as to the destruction of antichrist?

Yes; we read in Isaiah 30:33, "For the king also it is prepared," for that is how it should be read.

Ques. What is the "grounded staff"?

The staff, or rod, is the decreed rod of God which passes upon the Assyrian, and it is almost at the same time that "the king" falls.

In Psalm 144, we have the question, "LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!" It is curious that we find this appeal in Scripture, three times in three different ways.

In Job 7, it is: "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?" This is uttered in a complaining, naughty spirit: Why does the LORD take such notice of me, and make such a trouble about me? Why does He not depart from me, or let me alone till I swallow down my spittle? Why should the LORD think so much of me, and not cut me off?

Then, in Psalm 8, "What is man," that God is going to make His own Son a man, and set Him over every thing?

And here, in Psalm 144, it is, "What is man," that God should be so careful over this wicked people?

Psalm 145 forecasts, partially and prophetically, the millennium, and also the intercourse that will take place between Christ and His people in the millennium. Verse 7 truly celebrates Jehovah.

Psalms 146-150 give the great "Hallel." All is still connected with Israel, "the children of Zion" to whom is given a two-edged sword with which to execute judgment upon the peoples.

There is a tradition that they sang this hymn at the Passover. We find, too, the execution of vengeance, for these Psalms do not carry us through the millennium. The whole state of the people is taken up, from the quickening of the Remnant to the manifestation of the Messiah.

207 It is deplorable, the putting of Christians on the ground of the Psalms. Of course, there are things in them that suit us, as, for instance, trusting in the LORD, which is always right; but that which distinctively characterises the Psalms does not suit Christians; such as, "a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints."

Ques. How far are we to look in the Psalms for Christ's personal experiences?

They are found in Psalms 22 and 69, and, in a certain sense, in Psalm 102, though this latter is more poetical; and we find also in the Psalms certain things in which His heart associates itself, and which He Himself makes use of, as, for instance, He that "hath lifted up his heel against me"; and so also, "Thou shalt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption."

There is a mistranslation in Psalm 16:2, where I have no doubt the right reading is: "Thou [my soul] hast said to Jehovah, Thou art the Lord: my goodness [extendeth] not to thee; - to the saints that are on the earth, and to the excellent [thou hast said], In them is all my delight."

Ques. Might we assume that where in a Psalm an expression clearly refers to Christ, an the Psalm does so?

No; that would never be a safe assumption.

Strictly speaking, a hymn has always a person directly for its object. Of course, there are many beautiful hymns, or odes, or songs, that we could not sing in worship. Direct addresses of praise are the highest kind of language; but we may sing of blessing, as well as of the Blesser; though the highest kind of song, is that to the Blesser. It is self-will and human judgment, to reject everything but direct praise. The soul joys in salvation, as well as in God. "Lord Jesus! when I think of Thee," strikes a higher note than, "O Lord, how blest our journey," though both are right.

Only in Psalms 22 and 69 do we find Christ's experience in Gethsemane. There is no deliverance in Psalm 88, although, at one time, it was the only passage throughout the Bible that gave me comfort, for it shewed me one like myself pretty well in despair, and yet a saint it was who wrote it, so that perhaps after all I might be a saint. It ends with, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness."

208 Ques. What is the force of Psalm 89:38, "But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed"?

It refers to David, and to the cutting off of David's race, which would, however, be set up again in Christ. It has reference, not to atonement, but to the Lord as Messiah. God had promised David a house, and He had broken down David's house.

Ques. What is the meaning of, "Mine iniquities . . . are more than the hairs of mine head," in Psalm 40:12?

It is Christ taking the iniquities of the house of Israel upon Himself, though it is equally true for us.

In Psalm 69, it is Christ throughout, entering fully into the sorrows of His people.

In all prophecies, we have to distinguish between that which serves the prophet as a peg upon which to hang prophecy, and that which goes in spirit beyond the immediate prophecy. For instance, in Jeremiah 30:9, and 33:21, we have mention of David, the meaning of which is "beloved," and there, it clearly refers to Christ.

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