

Psalm 106: The Ugly Twin

Right! **Psalm 106** is the “ugly twin” to its more lovely counterpart, **Psalm 105**. But the family of God needs both. **Psalm 105** remembered the past in order to highlight God’s great redemptive acts on behalf of his people. **Psalm 106** follows with a remembrance of the peoples’ sinful rebellion against their God who rescues them. It tells a sad story of human faithlessness and wickedness, “studied oblivion,” yet the bigger emphasis ends up being on God’s great story of gracious and ongoing rescue. **Psalm 106** was probably written during the Babylonian exile or just after it, reminding the people then and us now that God keeps on “saving us from ourselves” out of his unfailing love for us.

As the closing psalm of Book IV of the Psalter, **Psalm 106** focuses on human rebellion in spite of the glorious “impossibilities” of YHWH. Israel is not given psalms to praise Moses or Aaron or Joshua or David, or the nation itself, but to boast in the LORD, “who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth.” (Jeremiah 9:24b) **Psalm 106** is a warning, *mingling hymnic material with communal lament*, intended to move its readers toward repentance, confession and renewed love for and trust in YHWH.

1. **Psalm 106** opens and closes like a hymn, but the core of the psalm is a prayer of confession of *nine episodes of conscious and willful rebellion* against God and his appointed leaders. The psalmist confesses the nation’s sin (“cosmic ingratitude”) by tracing their rebellious acts from Egypt to Canaan, not always following the same sequence as the narrative history. Here’s **Psalm 106’s** structure:

Prayer and praise in verses **1-5**, Man’s forgetfulness and God’s salvation at the crossing of the sea in verses **6-12**, Self-indulgent and self-seeking discontent in verses **13-18**, False religion and Moses as mediator in verses **19-23**, The word and the voice in verses **24-27**, False religion and Phinehas in **28-33**, Discontent with the LORD in verses **34-38**, Human rebellion and God’s remembrance in verses **39-46**, Prayer and praise in verses **47-48**.

2. Many Psalms scholars point out the *chiastic structure* of **Psalm 106**. Here’s an example of what that looks like from the New Bible Commentary, p. 556:

A¹ (vs 1-5) Praise and prayer
B¹ (vs 6-12) Man’s forgetfulness: God’s salvation
C¹ (vs 13-18) Discontent with God’s provisions
D¹ (vs 19-23) False religion: Moses
E (vs 24-27) The word and the voice
D² (vs 28-33) False religion: Phinehas
C² (vs 34-38) Discontent with the Lord
B² (vs 39-46) Man’s rebellion: God’s remembrance
A² (vs 47-84) Prayer and praise

Read the 2 A/s, 2 B/s, 2 C/s, and 2 D/s to see more clearly the themes the psalmist is developing. What stands out to you about this structure? What connections does it help you see? (Example: Moses and Phinehas both interceded for the people.) What are your thoughts about the single E, the one big idea around which the whole psalm pivots? How would you summarize that section? What appears to be the core of human rebellion? (**106:24-27**, “pleasant land”=life of radical faith?, his promise=voice of the Lord=word?)

3. Which of these incidents are you most familiar with? Least familiar with? How does the poetry of **Psalm 106** impact your understanding of these biblical narratives? What new information or understanding does it add, especially about the *character of God* and the possibility of *living by trusting him*?

How might reviewing these episodes of Israel’s faithlessness help us in the church be more aware of our own need for God’s grace to empower trust and obedience in us, for God to do for and in us what we can not do for ourselves?

4. This psalm celebrates the goodness of God in forgiving the sins of Israel and asks him to do it again and renew his people. As we pray this, we can ask God to deliver us now from sin and to renew and revive His church in the world.

Read James 5:7-20 and I Corinthians 10:1-13. Here’s a prayer outline of **Psalm 106** adapted from Moore’s *Psalms for Prayer*:

106:1-3 Praise God for His goodness and mercy and for all His mighty works

106:4-5 Seek God’s favor and ask to more fully understand His salvation

106:6-7 Confess your sins and those of the church

106:8-12 Praise God for his faithfulness in rescuing his people

106:13-18 Ask God to deliver you and His church from craving, lust, envy and jealousy

106:19-23 Pray for God to keep you and His church from idolatry of every kind

106:24-27 Pray that God will deliver us from disobedience to our mission

106:18-31 Pray for God to deliver us from moral compromise

106:32-33 Pray that God would quell grumbling among His people

106:34-39 Pray for God to deliver His church from entanglements with the world system and make us “happier, kinder, humbler and wiser” (Keller, p. 277)

106:40-43 Ask for God to withhold His wrath (his opposition to evil) from His people and deliver them from the oppression of their foes (Eph. 6:12)

106:44-48 Praise and thank God for His faithfulness and call upon him to renew His church (Romans 12:1-2)