

### 304 Standing In The Breach

The opening and closing words of Psalm 106 are these: "Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (verse 1, KJV); and, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say Amen. Praise ye the Lord" (verse 48).

But between that fine start and finish the rest of Psalm 106 tells a rather different story! We hear of the children of Israel from their time in bondage in Egypt (verse 6), through to their habitual idolatry as they "mingled among the heathen, and learned their works" (verse 35ff). Not surprisingly, "Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people ... he abhorred his own inheritance ... he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them" (vv 41-42).

So here before us in this Psalm is the familiar sequence we come across so often through the Old Testament. The covenant having been established between the Lord and His people, with commitments and responsibilities on both sides, the people quickly forget "the multitude of (God's) mercies" (verse 7). They copy, or mix with, the heathen nations around them, adopting numerous idolatrous practices and abominations (egs., vv 13,19,21,24-25,28,32,34-39,43b). God judges them (egs., vv 17-18,26-27,29b,40-42), or prepares to judge them (eg., verse 23a). Finally and repeatedly the Lord steps in in His mercy and redeems the situation (egs., vv 8-11,43a, 44-46). All is well for a brief time (eg., verse 12) before the whole process starts again.

We see in verse 8 how the Lord sometimes intervenes Himself, irrespective of any request for Him to do so – "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake" (verse 8). In other words, the Lord at times intervenes to protect the honour of His own name, when it is being "dragged through the mud" by people who are known to be associated with Him; the first, second and third of the Ten Commandments come to mind on this point (Exodus 20.1-7). At other times the people themselves cry out to the Lord in repentance, or beg their leaders to pray on their behalf (egs., Numbers 21.7 / I Samuel 12.19).

And then, of special relevance for us all in these days, particular individuals intercede for the sinful people before the Lord. In Psalm 106 we read of Phinehas who stood up and "executed judgement" (verse 30), thus causing the plague of judgement to be "stayed", as we learn so graphically in Numbers 25.6-9.

Pride of place in terms of intercession must go to Moses himself. We read in Psalm 106.23 that God was ready to destroy His people, "had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them" (Exodus 32.25-35).

The Lord still hearkens to individuals from among His people who will "stand in the breach" and thereby hold back whatever is set to burst forth through that breach. God's Christ-redeemed people are "standers-in-the-breach" by their very presence in any community, their spiritual saltiness both upholding goodness and preventing, or at least delaying, moral decadence (eg., Matthew 5.13). But, following Moses' lead,

they also stand in the breach in prayer, pleading before the Lord to turn away His wrath and threatened destruction of a sinful people or nation.

Such pleading intercession is plainly necessary in these difficult days for the United Kingdom, in which there are some obvious similarities with the children of Israel of long ago. Both share a historical knowledge of the living God and a historical adherence to His Word, and both have been recipients of, and channels for, many divine blessings over the centuries. Yet unfortunately both have wilfully turned aside from the Lord into deep sinfulness, the effects of which were as apparent in Moses' day as they are in our own day. Both therefore, then and now, end up in line for God's righteous judgements. The assumption around in some prayer groups today therefore, that God sees this country as "a jolly good fellow" and stands ever-ready to pour out His rich blessings on us whenever we care to ask, is worryingly wide of the mark.

Like Moses, each of us, how ever feeble may be our prayers, are called to "stand in the breach" before the Lord, coming with deep repentance "boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4.16), and pleading for His mercy upon this sinful country. If people like us don't do this, we can be sure that nobody else will! The grounds for our pleading are old and well-trodden: first, the presence here still of "a faithful praying remnant" of God's people, who love and serve Him by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest; and second, our longing that the Lord will show mercy upon us simply for the sake of His own precious name.

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