

PSALM 85. GOD IN A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS.

These notes are written to help you enjoy and use the Psalm for your own prayers. Feel free to leave anything that seems too complicated. It's not intended to be academic.

Structure of Psalm 85.

The notes of introduction say the psalm was composed **for** 'the director of music', i.e. of music in the temple or place of worship, **by** 'the sons of Korah'. We see some Korahites at 2 Chronicles 20:19, and are told they had very loud voices!

The whole nation / land was in a time of serious crisis.

1 – 3. These words are addressed TO THE LORD.

"In the past, you showed favour to your land, O LORD".

Q1: What six things did the LORD do, in the past?

Q2: What has God done for our own nation in the past?

4 – 7. These words also are addressed TO THE LORD. They are requests and cries for help.

Q3. What requests / cries for help are there in verses 4 and 7?

Q4. What questions to the LORD are there in verses 5 and 6?

Q5. We are not told what this national crisis was, or when. But can you use your imagination to think what it might have been?

8. An individual think and reflects on how to respond.

9 -13. The LORD's character is 'sure' (v9) and his promises can be trusted.

So, these verses are almost a defiant creed:

'Even though we are in the midst of a great crisis, we shall still declare the salvation / love / faithfulness and righteousness of the LORD. He will 'indeed give us what is good' (v 12).

Q6: What is your faith in God when things are going wrong?

Word Studies

Very often in the Psalms, we come across some important words which describe the character of the LORD.

Salvation, saviour (4, 7, 9). This word is active, meaning 'Our saving God, the God who saves, who wins the victory for us'. To save means to come to the help of those who are threatened. The saviour of a people is the one who wins the battle for them.

At Exodus 14:13, the people were terrified, stuck between the water of the Red Sea and the massive army of Egypt. Moses declared: *Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation (rescue, victory) which the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you need only to be still.*

The Lord won the victory and showed himself the Saviour of the people.

Later, we read at Matthew 1:21 that the baby was called "Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins".

Faithfulness (10, 11). The Hebrew word is 'Amen'. It means to support, to be firm and solid. It can mean pillars (which hold up a roof). God is faithful because he is solid, reliable and keeps his covenant promises. God is 'Amen'. We add an "Amen" to our prayers because we are confident that God will faithfully hear and answer. 'Amen' is sometimes translated as 'truth'.

Righteousness (10, 11, 13) Like the other words, this is dynamic. God is righteous because he is always right, fair and just, and because he puts things right for his people. The word also has the idea of winning the victory. In the context of The Plagues in Egypt, Pharaoh said to Moses, "The Lord is righteous". By this, he meant, 'God is stronger than I am; he has won the victory'. The word does also have a moral sense, i.e. right living, doing the right thing.

Love (7, 10). The Hebrew word can be translated as 'mercy', 'steadfast love' or 'love'. God made a covenant relationship with his people. He promised to be God to Abraham's descendants, and to bless them. "Love" is the word that means that God keeps his promise to show mercy and to bless. God is loving because he has made a covenant with his people. At the Last Supper, Jesus said that he was making a new, renewed covenant by dying and rising for us. Later, St Paul wrote, "God shows his love for us; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The LORD gets angry. Q7: What are we to make of God's "wrath, fierce anger" (3), "displeasure" (4), "anger" (5)?

The Bible is clear that God is on the side of widows, orphans, refugees, i.e. those who need protecting. God requires governments to protect the poor as a first responsibility.

At Exodus 22:21 God says, *'Do not ill-treat or oppress a foreigner... Do not take advantage of a widow or orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused'*.

The Bible shows God is just and right. He is angry at injustice, cruelty and unfaithfulness. He is also 'gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love' (Psalm 103:8). In other words, he doesn't 'fly off the handle' and "Hulk out" (See Bruce Banner becoming angry in 'The Incredible Hulk'); but he loves us all too much to leave us alone.

Before we dismiss this "angry God", let us consider:

The *opposite* of an 'angry God' is a passive God who stands on the sidelines, doesn't care or get involved, and does nothing.

God is not the abstract, theoretical God of Greek philosophy, who is distant and unknowable. Our God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son. In Jesus, God acted; he became flesh, one of us, fully involved. Like his heavenly Father, Jesus actively cared; also like his Father, he too could express anger at sin and unbelief.

Questions for you to consider:

Q1: What six things did the LORD do, in the past?

Q2: What has God done for our own nation in the past?

Q3. What requests / cries for help are there in verses 4 and 7?

Q4. What questions to the LORD are there in verses 5 and 6?

Q5. We are not told what this national crisis was, or when. But can you use your imagination to think what it *might* have been?

Q6: What is your faith in God when things are going wrong?

Q7: What are we to make of God's "wrath, fierce anger"?