

# Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

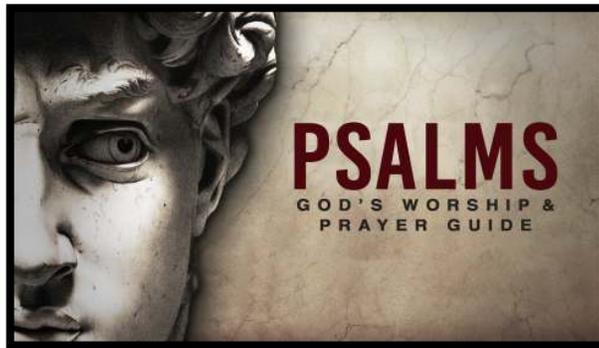
## The Crazy Cycle: Part 2

Psalm 106

Written By

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I loved to attend the annual country fair in the Imperial Valley as I grew up. The rides couldn't have been better, the exhibits were fun, and who doesn't love cotton candy?

One ride I'll never forget looked like an old Spanish pirate ship. As you entered the door located in the side of the ship, you walked down an ever-darkening corridor full of twists and turns. Donnie, my best friend, led the way, so I stayed close to him. At one point in the darkness, I saw him kneel down and crawl into a dark box-like hole and then scream. I paused while his voice trailed off into the distance.

While waiting there, I heard a repetitive mechanical sound from a motor. I also heard a whooshing sound, something like rubber hitting rubber. . Surmising the situation, I realized multiple large boxes were moving past me in a circular manner, and the rubber sound originated from gaskets on the boxes hitting gaskets on the wall by my head.

Not wanting to look wimpy to my buddy, I crawled quickly into the next darkened open box. Whoa. Talk about scary and disorienting. Round and round I went. Within a few minutes I realized I had another problem. How was I ever going to get off of and out of this dark box?

So, I did what any Junior Higher would do. I started calling Donnie's name . . . real loud. Every time I went past his position in the lone exit tunnel, he'd scream, "Hey, man, you gotta jump when you see some dim light." I argued every time I'd pass him, "Jump? Jump where? Are you kidding me?" He'd reply, "Marty, you gotta trust me. Jump the next time you approach my voice."

Believe me, the only way I escaped that dark box moving in a circular, cyclical fashion was to do what Donnie told me. I remember the moment I finally mustered the courage to leave the darkness and head toward that faintly lit exit tunnel. Once I did it, I ran into Donnie, and within

a few minutes we crawled to light and freedom. If it hadn't been for Donnie's bravery and help, I'd probably still be on that ride I jumped on back in the late 1960s.

Right now this story might be a metaphor of your Christian walk. You had a great life with Christ all the way up to your willful walk onto a ride let's call carnal sin (1 Cor. 3:1-5). Next thing you knew, you wound up in a dark box of wickedness, spinning around in a seemingly hopeless, endless circular cycle. Perhaps you are "trapped" in that box right now, but you want out, you want to move toward freedom and spiritual light and life again. What do you need to do?

You need to listen to the Donnie who wrote Psalm 106.

## It's Time To Stop The Crazy Sin Cycle (Psalm 106)

### Realize There's A Right Path (Psalm 106:1-5)

Verse three is pivotal to those interested in being on the life path God blesses.

<sup>3</sup> How blessed are those who keep justice, who practice righteousness at all times!

Doers of the Word, those who are willfully obedient to the commands and teachings of the Holy Scriptures are those who walk effectively in this life. Of course, one must be mindful daily of how they are walking, and purposefully make course corrections which exemplify God's standard of true justice and holiness.

Verse four gives us our first hint that the psalmist, living in the Babylonian captivity, had sinned and needed spiritual restoration only God could provide.

<sup>4</sup> Remember me, O LORD, in *Thy* favor toward Thy people; visit me with Thy salvation, <sup>5</sup> That I may see the prosperity of Thy chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance (Ps. 106).

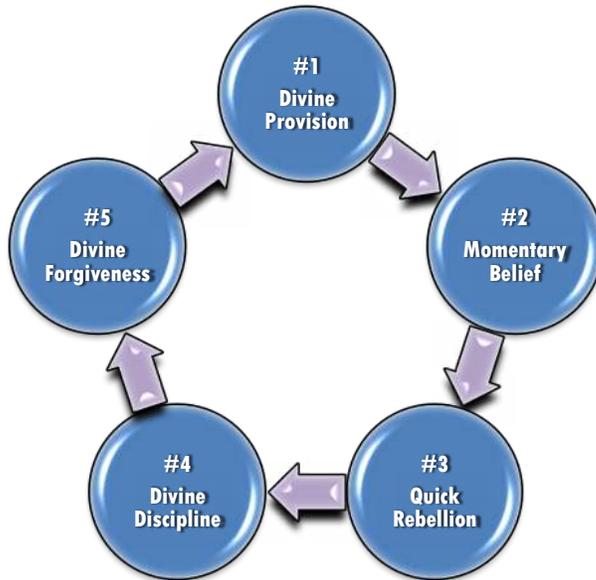
From verses six through forty-six, the psalmist talks honestly and openly how he had, like his forefathers, purposefully left the righteous path and taken a stroll down the path of sin. Additionally, he confesses, as we should too, how this departure led to a personal and historical carnal sin cycle he desperately wanted to break free from. Can you relate? If so, learn from the psalmist's way out of the seemingly endless dark cycle of evil.

Freedom starts with a candid admission:

### Realize There's A Wrong Path (Psalm 106:6-46)

From the Psalmist's perspective there is nothing new under the proverbial sun, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 1). Instead of learning from the sordid track record of saints of old, and, then, heading in a different direction, current saints tend to commit the same types of sin God opposed of old. It's shocking, but true. The Psalmist illustrates this truth by analyzing two vast periods

of Israel's history. Before we sink our interpretive shovels into this lengthy period, I invite you to reacquaint yourself with the sin cycle detailed herein.



Verses 7 through 33 provide us with six historical snapshots of Israel from the period of the wilderness wanderings. Each picture reveals how God's people purposefully crawled onto the dark merry-go-round of sin. Verses 34 through 46 remind us how these ancient saints failed to consistently obey God's commands for holiness during the period of the Judges. Eventually, God disciplined them and they returned to Him . . . but it was only temporary. Next thing they knew and they were right back in the dark, circular moving box on a

spiritual ride to nowhere. All of this, of course, should make any Christian stop and ask themselves: What are the historical and spiritual snapshots of my life? Are they more cyclical or linear? Linear, no doubt, is far better because it shows progression toward holiness and spiritual maturation.

With all this in mind, let's take a look at the first spiritual photo album of Israel.

*Photo Album #1: The Wandering Period (Psalm 106:7-33).* Let's review the first two snapshots.

*Snapshot #1: The Exodus (vv. 7-12).* Even though God redeemed them in a never-to-be-forgotten miraculous fashion ten times in a row, Israel still complained, griped, and chafed under God's loving leadership as they stared down the approaching Egyptian chariots. Lovingly and mercifully, God intervened and delivered them by parting the Red Sea. Has He done this in your life? Through various life situations has He powerfully shown you that He is with you, only to see you fold like a lawn chair when a bigger, seemingly more ominous trial comes your way? Did you, will you, praise Him?

*Snapshot #2: The Bread and the Birds (vv. 13-15).* Not long after the Red Sea miracle we find God's chosen people utterly consumed with what they would eat. Sad, isn't it? Their perpetual complaint as they walked on the hot desert sand . . . with divine cloud cover, of course . . . revolved around food provision. How could they question the God who had just parted the deep blue waters of the Red Sea? Since He parted waters, one would think it would be no issue for Him to provide bread and meat for His weary pilgrims. Sin has a way of distorting your thoughts about God, regardless of His past actions. Once more, God miraculously moved to provide for them, but in their provision some of them met with his displeasure and discipline. What about you? Are you a complainer, a godly grumbler who is never content with God's provision, and who always frets and worries about whether God will show up as you trudge through the desert sands of life? I think it is a cycle which needs to be broken in your life before God moves to get your attention.

*Snapshot #3: The Coup D'etat* (vv. 16-18). When did this occur? When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their group of 250 adherents attempted to overthrow the divinely appointed leadership of Moses and Aaron.

<sup>16</sup> When they became envious of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of the Lord, <sup>17</sup> The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and engulfed the company of Abiram. <sup>18</sup> And a fire blazed up in their company; the flame consumed the wicked.

Why did these mis-guided men want to be Israel's new leaders? They were jealous of how close Moses and Aaron were to God, and they also wanted the power over the people these two saints possessed. So, they verbally accosted this dynamic duo with fake news designed to demoralize them and get them to abdicate their God-given roles (Num. 16:1-3, 12-14). God removed them in a big way, didn't He? A pin-pointed earthquake caused the ground to open up and swallow the usurpers, and a flame-thrower like fire came from heaven and incinerated the 250 supporters (Num. 16:31-35). God couldn't have more definitively taught His people about the danger of challenging leaders He had appointed, and about striving after political power at all costs.

Obviously, the Psalmist readily identified with this subversive, coup d'etat spirit. Do you as well? I've seen Korah, Dathan, and Abiram too many times in my life. They are the "godly ones" who oppose pastoral leadership, and who appoint themselves as the ones positioned to overthrow that leadership through confrontation, disinformation, and sowing seeds of dissension. Who here has not heard a story like this? The question is, Are you guilty of moving from church to church with the goal of wreaking havoc so you can assume some power and control? Mark it well that God disciplines those who work against His anointed leaders.

*Snapshot #4: The Carnal Calf Incident* (vv. 19-23). After waiting forty days for old man Moses to walk back down Mount Sinai where he was in God's presence receiving the Law, the people spiritually snapped:

<sup>19</sup> They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped a molten image. <sup>20</sup> Thus they exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass. <sup>21</sup> They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, <sup>22</sup> Wonders in the land of Ham, and awesome things by the Red Sea. <sup>23</sup> Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying *them*.

Stunning. Even after witnessing God's miraculous provision on their journey and His ominous presence in the fire on the mount, the people still walked off the spiritual reservation by getting Aaron to build them a metal calf so they could worship God in this new fashion. From what we learn from Exodus 32 verses 5 and 6 they not only worshipped God in the form of a detestable idol in the form of a bull (and thereby broke the second commandment, Ex. 20:4-6), but they also "rose up to play," which suggests they engaged in immoral sexual activity too (and thereby broke the seventh commandment, Ex. 20:14).

Jaw dropping. Strange how when man waters down the person of God, he quickly engages in illicit sexual activity. He does this because his new religious perspective is more accepting of his deviant behavior. Anymore our culture has absolutely no concept of sexual perversion since

“all love is love” in their minds. Thinking like this is most certainly seeping into the lives of believers, causing them to engage in perversion under the thin veiled guise of “love.” Perhaps a professor at school this last year caused you to start questioning the person of God altogether, or perhaps he/she placed so many provocative questions in your mind about God, you just don’t know what to think anymore, so you are opting to water your view of God down, as Israel did. If you head down this road, know that perversion is just around the corner for your new god will not be so rigid and inflexible about your sexual activity.

What about it? Are you caught on this cyclical sin cycle of perversion? If so, I’m sure your conscience is getting the better of you because you know you are living a lifestyle God not only detests but will judge in order to move you back toward holy behavior. His judgment will not be of the order of that against ancient Israel (Ex. 32:25-29) for He sought to make a definitive example of them. But know He will make a move to discipline you so you will be motivated to leave the darkness for the light. Are you listening?

*Snapshot #5: The Tale of the Spineless Spies* (vv. 24-27). Even with countless episodes of God’s provision, the people’s rebellion, God’s discipline, the people’s repentance, God’s provision followed by *more rebellion* and so on and so forth, ten special ops spies still froze in fear when it came to taking possession of the land God had promised the nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

<sup>24</sup> Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe in His word, <sup>25</sup> But grumbled in their tents; They did not listen to the voice of the LORD. <sup>26</sup> Therefore He swore to them, That He would cast them down in the wilderness, <sup>27</sup> And that He would cast their seed among the nations, And scatter them in the lands (Psalm 106).

This is a short version of the longer version recorded in Numbers 13:

<sup>25</sup> When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, <sup>26</sup> they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup> "Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> "Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." <sup>30</sup> Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it" (Num. 13).

Let me see. Can God can turn the Nile to blood? Check. Can God part the vast deep of the Red Sea so you can escape to safety? Check. Can God make sure your shoes and clothes do not wear out in forty years? Check. Can God give you a localized cloud cover by day in the desert EVERY DAY? Check. Can God provide light at night by means of a whirling pillar of fire? Check. Can God provide miraculously for you time and time again in the God-forsaken blistering, endless desert?

Check. But you, as a spy, don't think He can enable you to seize the land of Promise from the wicked Canaanite? Yes. Impossible, you say?

What about you? You guilty of not trusting the promise and Word of God? You choosing to believe a negative report so you don't have to step out in faith? You listening to the voice of the crowd as opposed to the voice of God so you don't have to do a harder, loftier thing? You choosing to disregard the Scriptures all because of fear and opposition you may face? You afraid of being cancelled, demoted, or derailed for doing what God wants? Is distrusting God what you tend to do when you are up against the major life challenge He has put before you? Far wiser to move on with your faith.

- Go to that mission field.
- Switch your life occupation.
- Speak up and out at work about concepts which matter most to God.
- Change universities in the middle of your education to get into a less hostile environment.
- Break off a relationship you should have never started in the first place.
- Write your superior a letter you know you must send.
- Trust God even in the face of a less than optimal medical diagnosis.

Move forward, not backward. Be linear, not cyclical.

Again, Israel's penchant for bolting in the face of a great spiritual opportunity met with God's discipline as those twenty years old and upwards had to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Their children were then given the opportunity to do what their parents failed to do. If you won't crawl out of that box of darkness you have settled into, God will, out of love for you, attempt to box you in so you will be motivated to be obedient to His Word and will. So, move toward His voice. He's calling you right now to come toward Him.

*Snapshot #6: The Non-Aversion To Perversion* (vv. 28-31). Forty years later, we have the children of the formerly wayward parents, dropping their guard regarding worship and acceptable sexual behavior, AGAIN:

<sup>28</sup> They joined themselves also to Baal-peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead.

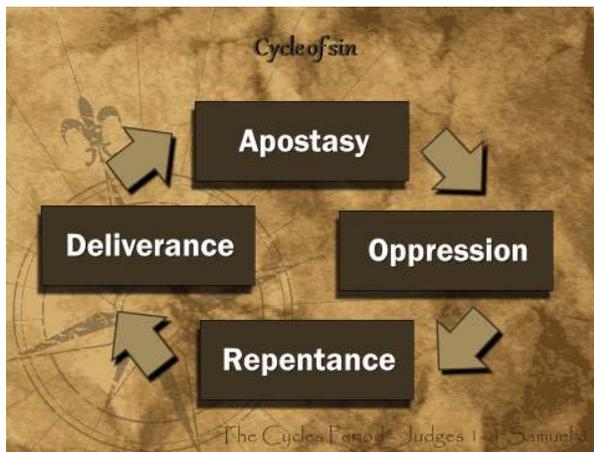
<sup>29</sup> Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds; and the plague broke out among them. <sup>30</sup> Then Phinehas stood up and interposed; and so the plague was stayed. <sup>31</sup> And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, to all generations forever.

With the Promised Land in view from the mountains of Moab to the east, the young people of Israel wasted no time having illicit sexual relationships with Moabite young people, and they did this and rationalized it because it was all part of the worship of Baal, the god of Peor (Num. 25:3).

God responded by taking 24,000 of them out with a plague. Talk about harsh discipline. He obviously wanted to underscore the danger of worshipping a false god and engaging in sex outside the confines of marriage between a man and a woman. His discipline still stands today as a warning to His people who dare worship another god, and who would engage in sexual activity He deems is inappropriate and wicked. And, yes, sexual perversion does still exist today no matter what the carnal, sex-crazed culture says.

What about you? Anyone tempting you to sexually compromise yourself? Are you tempting yourself with all the mind-games you play? Are you doing something with someone you know you should not be doing? Are you cyclically enslaved to this type of activity? God, my friend, is calling you to identify your sin cycle and to head toward Him in repentant faith. Will you say this day that you are, in fact, willfully stuck in that dark merry-go-round of sin? That admission is the first step toward spiritual health and wholeness. Unfortunately, no many make it without divine discipline. Such is the sad story of ancient Israel in the wilderness wanderings. It's a tragic tale which followed them into the next historical period the Psalmist addresses:

*Photo Album #2: The Judges Period (Psalm 106:34-46).* This tragic time in Israel lasted from 1390 B.C. until 1051 B.C. As with the previous period in the wandering, Israel continued the sin cycle God sought to minimize in their lives. Read on and you will see what I mean:



<sup>34</sup> They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, <sup>35</sup> But they mingled with the nations, and learned their practices, <sup>36</sup> And served their idols, Which became a snare to them. <sup>37</sup> They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, <sup>38</sup> And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with the blood. <sup>39</sup> Thus

they became unclean in their practices, and played the harlot in their deeds. <sup>40</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people, and He abhorred His inheritance. <sup>41</sup> Then He gave them into the hand of the nations; and those who hated them ruled over them. <sup>42</sup> Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were subdued under their power. <sup>43</sup> Many times He would deliver them; they, however, were rebellious in their counsel, And so sank down in their iniquity. <sup>44</sup> Nevertheless He looked upon their distress, when He heard their cry; <sup>45</sup> And He remembered His covenant for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness. <sup>46</sup> He also made them *objects* of compassion In the presence of all their captors.

Do you see the sinful cycle on full display? How could you not? Israel's apostasy lead to divinely appointed oppression, which led to their repentance and God's deliverance, and then the cycle started all over again as God sent numerous saviors to rescue them. In the end, the people kept returning back to the

CYCLE	TEXT	ENEMY	JUDGES
1	3:8-11	Mesopotamia	Othniel
2	3:12-31	Moab	Ehud Shamgar
3	4:1-5:31	Canaanites	Deborah Barak
4	6:1-10:5	Midianites	Gideon, Tola, Jair
5	10:6-12:15	Ammon	Jephtah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon
6	13:1-16:31	Philistines	Samson
7	1 Sam. 1-8	Philistines	Samuel

same sins which engulfed and enslaved them as before.

What should they have done? They should have simply obeyed God and not followed after their own lusts. Had they done this, blessing would have been theirs. Instead, they faced hard times manufactured by God to move them toward holiness.

I wonder. What do the spiritual photo albums of your life really look like? Are they more cyclical or linear? Do you continue to drift back into the same old sins, or are you making appreciable movement toward freedom and victory? These two priceless concepts come when you first realize there is a right path, when you admit you just might be on the wrong path, and lastly . . .

### There Is A Right Prayer (Psalm 106:47-48)

The first two words here out of the mouth of the disheartened, discouraged Psalmist give us the counsel we should crave at this juncture:

<sup>47</sup> Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Thy holy name, and glory in Thy praise. <sup>48</sup> Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the LORD!

“Save us O LORD our God.” Isn’t that what you need right now, salvation by God? Indeed. He is the only one equipped to save you from you and your proclivity to choose darkness over light. Will you call out to Him right now? I think you can hear His voice. He’s calling out to you as you continue to move past Him in the revolving box of darkness you’ve crawled into. So, next time you approach His position in the light, don’t be afraid to quickly move toward Him. This will prove to be one of the most exciting days of your life for now you are free and in the hands of the One who will lead you in the way you know you should go.

For the Christian, the salvation in question is related to practical sin. Based on their on their faith in Christ’s redemptive work, they are positionally holy, as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30.

For the non-Christian, salvation is needed so Christ, the Savior, can forgive and cleanse you from positional sin (Rom. 5:1-2). Once He becomes your Lord by faith not only are you given His holiness, His Spirit is given to you to equip you to resist sin and embrace godly behavior (Eph. 1:13-14; 5:18ff; 1 Cor. 12:13ff). So, in light of this theological truth, Christ is waiting for you to call out to Him today. The prayer is simple: Lord, save me a sinner. Pray and He *will* save (John 3:16-18) for His character is intrinsically tied to His salvific promise to you.

