

Dr. David Emanuel, Psalms of the Exodus,

Session 4: Psalm 106 - Standing in the Gap

6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's dive into an ancient text today, Psalm 106. Now, at first glance, you might just see a long history lesson, you know, a list of stuff that happened thousands of years ago. But trust me, this psalm has a secret.

It's this incredibly crafted message with a hidden purpose. And that's exactly what we're going to uncover. You ever get that feeling when you're reading through old historical accounts, especially ancient ones, and they all kind of start to blur together? You see a list of events, a couple of rebellions, and it's this familiar pattern.

It's so easy to just think, yeah, yeah, I've heard this one before. But here's the thing. While the Bible has a bunch of psalms that retell history, none of them are the same.

They're all incredibly unique. See, each writer is retelling the story with a very specific goal in mind. They're not just listing facts.

They're actually building an argument. And Psalm 106, well, it's making one of the most fascinating arguments of all. What's really wild is where this psalm shows up.

It's right after Psalm 105, and they are total opposites. I mean, a complete 180. Psalm 105 is a celebration.

It's like a highlight reel of God's faithfulness. But Psalm 106, it just flips the script entirely. It tells the exact same story, but from the opposite point of view.

Israel's constant epic failure. It's not a party. It's a confession.

So if this isn't a celebration, if it's not trying to make you feel proud or nostalgic about the past, what is it? The author is trying to get a totally different emotional reaction out of you. This whole story of the exodus is being used for something else entirely. And the key to unlocking the whole thing is knowing what kind of literature it is.

It's a lament. This thing was not written in a time of peace and quiet. No, this was written from a place of deep national pain, a desperate cry for help.

The history isn't really the point. It's the evidence. It's exhibit A in a legal case for mercy.

The way the psalm is built is just wow. It kicks off with one single high point. God miraculously saving Israel at the Red Sea.

Awesome, right? But from that moment on, it is a straight shot down. It's a consistent downward spiral. Every single event the psalmist picks is another step down that ladder of moral failure.

It's just a relentless story of messing up. And get this. The author isn't even following a strict timeline.

The events are all jumbled up to have a bigger impact. For example, the whole golden calf disaster is mentioned way later than it actually happened. So why do that? Because the psalmist isn't trying to be a historian here.

He's an artist, and he's carefully arranging the pieces to build a theme, not just a timeline. But then, right in the middle of this super bleak story of failure, the author throws in a twist. Out of the muck of all this national failure, a few heroic people shine through.

And these aren't just little side notes. They are absolutely central to the Psalm's whole message. First up, we've got Moses.

Now, in other psalms about the Exodus, Moses is a servant, or he's a miracle worker. But here? Here, he's shown in a very specific role. He's an intercessor.

He is the one guy who stood in the breach, literally stood in the gap in the wall to save the whole nation from being wiped out. And right after that, boom, the psalmist points to another hero, Phineas. This is the only time he even shows up in any of the Exodus psalms.

And just like Moses, he stands up, he intervenes, and his one action stops a disaster for everybody. You see the pattern? The psalmist is definitely trying to tell us something here. So here's the huge point being made.

The psalmist is embedding this powerful idea inside his story of failure: that in a time of national crisis, the righteous act of just one person can change everything. Remember that idea. It's going to be really, really important in a minute.

The author's skill is also super subtle in who he decides not to mention. So in the story of the big rebellion, Korah's name is just gone, probably to protect the reputation of the famous school of psalmists that he founded. And during the golden calf mess, the sin is there, but Aaron, you know, the guy who actually made the idol, he's nowhere to be found.

The psalmist is being very careful to protect the legacy of Israel's most important leaders. So why? Why all this careful editing? Why focus so much on failure? Why put the spotlight on these individual heroes? Well, all of these weird little details suddenly click into place and make perfect sense when we figure out when this psalm was actually written. Think of it like a detective story.

The smoking gun is right there in verse 47, a direct plea to be gathered from among the nations. You combine that with the psalm's whole vibe of grief and distress, and the evidence points overwhelmingly to one specific time: the Babylonian exile, when the nation had been crushed, and its people were scattered everywhere. And knowing that context changes everything.

The author isn't just pointing fingers and saying, man, our ancestors really messed up. Way back at the beginning of the psalm, he says, we have sinned just like they did. He is personally taking on centuries of his nation's failure.

And that is the whole point of this psalm. It's a powerful, powerful act of intercessory prayer. The author isn't standing apart from the sins of the past.

He's owning them. He is taking on the burden for the entire nation, past and present, and confessing it all. And this, this is the final brilliant aha moment.

Why did he focus so hard on Moses and Phineas? Because he sees himself playing their role. He is one person living in a time of absolute national disaster, and he is standing in the gap, praying for the salvation of his people. The entire history lesson was just the setup for his own personal, desperate prayer.

So what do we do with all this? Why does this ancient prayer, written from a dark time of exile, still hit so hard today? The absolute genius of Psalm 106 is how it's put together. It's a lament that uses a history of failure to build a case for mercy. It lifts up these heroes who step in and intercede.

It presents itself as a deeply personal prayer for a whole nation. I mean, it is basically a masterclass in how to find a path toward hope when you're in the darkest of times. When it comes down to it, the Psalmist isn't just wallowing in failure.

He's using it. By being brutally honest and confessing the full history of his people's unfaithfulness, he makes the strongest argument possible for why God, in his own faithfulness, has to be the one to step in and save them. And that just leaves us with this incredible question to think about.

This Psalmist took a long, hard, painful look at a legacy of failure and somehow found in it a strategy for prayer and a real reason for hope. So it makes you wonder, in our own lives, in our own communities, how can looking back at our greatest failures become the very blueprint we need to build our future hope?