

Exodus Psalms: Psalm 106: Standing in the Gap

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Abstract

Dr. David Emanuel examines Psalm 106 as an exilic lament that recontextualizes the Exodus narrative through a personal confessional prayer acknowledging national guilt. Unlike other historical recitals that present divine actions in isolation or omit active human figures, Psalm 106 uniquely highlights proactive intercessors like Moses and Phinehas who stand in the gap to turn away divine wrath. The psalm constructs a historical progression moving from high-point deliverance at the sea through continuous moral decline and covenant rebellion, reflecting the historical plight and spiritual needs of the Babylonian exile. Ultimately, the composition functions as a powerful intercessory plea for restoration, encouraging a displaced generation to own their ancestral shortcomings while trusting in God's enduring compassion.

Outline

I. Introduction to Psalm 106 and Exilic Setting

A. Overview of Psalm 106 as an Exilic Lament

1. Identification as a lament genre (Hermann Gunkel classification)
2. Contrast with praise/wisdom Exodus psalms (Psalms 78, 105, 136)
3. Historical setting in the Babylonian Exile (~587 BCE)
4. Key exilic evidence: Verse 47 petition ("Save us... and gather us from among the nations")

B. Unique Literary and Theological Features

1. Prominence of active, complex human figures (Moses, Phinehas)
2. Framed around individual confessional prayer ("Remember me", "We have sinned")
3. Concept of "Passover Reversal" where the exilic author owns ancestral guilt

II. Deliverance at the Red Sea: The Pinnacle of Obedience

A. Divine Act and Creation Terminology

1. Sea crossing as the pinnacle and high point of Israel's obedience
2. Synonyms for Egypt (enemy, hater, adversary) and morphological play (mitzarav)
3. Use of creation imagery and mythology in rebuking the sea waters

B. Transition to Moral Degradation

1. Subsequent narrative trajectory as a continuous moral decline
2. Immediate rejection of divine memory and emergence of complaining

III. Cycles of Wilderness Rebellion and Human Intercession

- A. Manna and Quail Murmuring (Numbers 11 Allusion)
 1. Intense craving in the desert wilderness
 2. Addition of impatience: "They did not wait for his counsel"
- B. Rebellion of Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16 Allusion)
 1. Rising up against appointed leaders (Moses and Aaron)
 2. Divine judgment: Earth opening and consuming fire
 3. Omission of Korah: Protecting the Korahite psalm school or poetic abbreviation
- C. Golden Calf at Horeb and Moses' Intercession
 1. Idolatry at Sinai and intentional disruption of chronological ordering
 2. Moses standing in the breach/gap to avert divine destruction
 3. Textual critique and scribal changes (tikkun ha-sofrim regarding "their glory")
 4. Omission of Aaron's negative role to preserve early leadership sanctity
- D. Rejection of the Promised Land at Kadesh (Numbers 14 Allusion)
 1. Unbelief following the spies' report
 2. Merging desert judgment with the reality of exilic scattering among nations
- E. Apostasy at Baal Peor and Phinehas' Exaltation
 1. Joining to Baal Peor and sacrifices to the dead
 2. Phinehas standing up to stop the plague
 3. Exaltation of Phinehas: Reckoned to him as righteousness (Abrahamic allusion)
- F. Waters of Meribah (Numbers 20 Allusion)
 1. Moses' rash speech at the waters of Meribah
 2. Shifting primary blame and accountability onto the rebellious people

IV. Cycles of Sin in the Land and Exilic Reflection

- A. Canaanite Idolatry and Child Sacrifice
 1. Adoption of pagan practices and child sacrifice in the monarchic era
 2. Severe moral decay leading directly to exilic captivity
- B. Divine Compassion Amid Judgment
 1. God remembering His covenant despite national failure
 2. Making Israel objects of compassion in the presence of their captors
- C. Canonical Context and Book IV Closure
 1. Juxtaposition with Psalm 107 (prayer for gathering answered)
 2. Position closing Book IV of the Psalter (The "Book of Moses")
 3. Central theological theme: God as King in the absence of a human monarch