

THEISM

“Oh, Give Thanks to the Lord for He is Good”

The goodness of God is declared in many scriptures (e.g., Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 25:8; 31:19; 33:5; 34:8; 52:1; 73:1; 86:5; 100:5; 103:8; 119:68; 145:8-9; Lamentation 3:25; Acts 14:17). To say that God is good is to make an assessment about His perfect nature. Nothing is lacking in God. His goodness is perfect, nothing can be added to make His goodness better. The name God, in English, comes from the term “good.” The original Saxon meaning of the English word God is “The Good.” The Hebrew term for “good” that is descriptive of God’s perfect character is also translated into English by such varied terms as merciful, kindly, loving kindness, favor.

Created things and beings are declared good by God (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Although the goodness of creation is derived from God, God’s goodness is inherent in the essence of His very being. Hence, Jesus could declare that “no one is good but One, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18). God is not defined in terms of goodness, but rather goodness is defined by the nature of God.

People observe the goodness of God because experiences with Him demonstrate that his activity is good. Psalm 107 provides such an observation. ***The central theme of Psalm 107 is that God is good.*** Because the Psalmist had experienced the goodness of God, he could exhort, “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 107:1, see also 106:1; 118:1; 136:1; see also 1 Chronicles 16:34, NKJV). This exhortation to give thanks was specifically addressed to the redeemed who had been recipients of the goodness of God, i.e., thus, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Psalm 107:2). This psalm declares that God is good because he redeemed his people “from the hand of the enemy” and gathered them “out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (verses 2-3). These specifics regarding redemption have influenced many scholars to believe that Psalm 107 was written when the Israelites were in Babylonian exile. Even so, the message of this psalm has universal application.

Psalm 107 is divided into seven sections. After the introductory exhortation (verses 1-3), the next four sections portray how God, in His goodness, redeemed His people. He delivered them out of the wilderness (verses 4-9). He broke the bonds of prisoners (verses 10-16). He restored the sick (verses 17-22). And He showed his power to mariners in the sea (verses 23-32). The sixth section declares that God is good in his governance of nature and human events (verses 33-42). The last section indicates that the wise will observe and understand God’s loving kindness (verse 43).

The Psalmist describes God’s goodness in terms of redemption and governance. God’s goodness is evident because He redeems his people from their perils. Four times the plight of God’s people is described (verses 4-5; 10-12; 17-18; 23-27). Each time “they cried out to the Lord in their trouble” (verses 6, 13, 19, 28). Each time God delivered His people (verses 6-7; 13-14; 19; 28). Each time the Psalmist expressed his desire, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (verses 8, 15, 21, 31). And each time a description is given about God’s blessings to those who had cried out to him (verses 9, 16; 20, 29-30).

The Psalmists observes that God’s goodness is evident in his governance over nature and human events. He declares that God has power to turn “rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness.” This He does because of “the wickedness

of those who dwell in it” (verses 33-34). Conversely, God can turn “a wilderness into pools of water, and dry land into water springs.” (verse 35). The implication is that in this way God rewards the righteous who dwell there. “There He makes the hungry dwell, that they may establish a city for a dwelling place, and sow fields and plant vineyards, that they may yield a fruitful harvest. He also blesses them, and they multiply greatly; and He does not let their cattle decrease” (verses 36-38). The prophet Nahum expressed a similar thought, “The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him” (Nahum 1:7).

God is just in his governance over humanity. When the righteous “are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction and sorrow, He pours contempt on princes, And causes them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way; yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, And makes their families like a flock” (verses 39-41).

All who are righteous respond to God’s goodness by recognizing it and ceasing from iniquity (verse 42). Finally, the Psalmist declares that “whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the loving kindness of the Lord” (verse 43).

Many other scriptures also declare God’s goodness. A panoramic overview of the Old and New Testaments indicates that God’s goodness is made known by His activity. God’s goodness is demonstrated in creation and in His provisions for all living creatures (Psalms 145:8-9; Acts 14:17; James 1:17). His goodness is observed in his providential care (Genesis 28:8, 14; 1 Kings 17:9) and guidance (Genesis 50:20) of those who love and trust Him (Psalm 34:8; Ezra 8:22; Romans 8:28). God’s goodness is also indicated by His statutes (Psalm 119:64, 68).

God’s goodness is supremely manifested in His redemption of believers from their sins. Through the Law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood, God provided atonement for the sins of Israelites (Exodus 29:36; Leviticus 6:7; Deuteronomy 32:43; Proverbs 16:6). “Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He teaches sinners in the way” (Psalm 25:8). “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5).

No where is God’s goodness more greatly demonstrated than in the giving of his Son (Luke 2:10-11; John 3:16) to redeem believers from their sins (Romans 5:6-8; Titus 2:11). Eternal redemption is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12, 15). This salvation is made known through the gospel (Mark 1:1, 15; Luke 4:18; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 1:13; 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:10).

If the Psalmist, who lived before God’s eternal plan of redemption had been disclosed, had reason to thank God for his goodness, (and he did) surely we, to whom that plan of eternal redemption has now been made available, should have greater reason to thank God for his goodness. “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4, see also 2 Peter 3:9). Recognition of God’s goodness should prompt thanksgiving, praise, love and obedience. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Therefore, “give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so” (Psalm 107:1-2a). We can thank God not only for redemption from various plights in this life, as did the Psalmist, but also, like angels in heaven, we can thank God for his goodness in providing eternal redemption (Revelation 7:9-12).