

Lessons *of the Past*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 78, Psalm 105, Gal. 3:29, Psalm 106, Psalm 80, Num. 6:22–27, Psalm 135.*

Memory Text: “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (*Psalm 78:3, 4, NKJV*).

In numerous psalms, praise takes the form of narrating the Lord's mighty acts of salvation. These psalms are often called “salvation history psalms” or “historical psalms.” Some appeal to God's people, telling them to learn from their history, particularly from their and their ancestors' mistakes. Certain historical psalms contain a predominant hymnal note that highlights God's past wonderful deeds on behalf of God's people and that strengthen their trust in the Lord, who is able and faithful to deliver them from their present hardships.

The special appeal of the historical psalms is that they help us to see our lives as part of the history of God's people and to claim that past as our own. As we have been adopted into the family of the historic people of God through Christ (*Rom. 8:15; Rom. 9:24–26; Gal. 4:6, 7*), the historical heritage of the ancient people of Israel is indeed the account of our spiritual ancestry. Therefore, we can and should learn from their past, which is ours, as well.

The final goal is to realize that each generation of God's people plays a small but significant part in the grand historical unfolding of God's sovereign purposes in the great controversy.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 9.

The Lord's Unstoppable Faithfulness

Read Psalm 78. What three key historical epochs are highlighted in this psalm? What recurring lessons does Asaph draw from each period?

The reviews of Israel's past highlight God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. They also should teach coming generations not to repeat their ancestors' mistakes but to trust God and to remain faithful to His covenant. The psalmist uses history as a parable (*Ps. 78:2*), which means that the people should deeply ponder the psalm's message and search for the meaning for themselves. Psalm 78:2 is a prophetic description of Jesus' method of teaching in parables (*Matt. 13:34, 35*).

The psalm also reflects on the time of the Exodus (*Ps. 78:9–54*), the settlement in Canaan (*Ps. 78:55–64*), and the time of David (*Ps. 78:65–72*). It demonstrates the Lord's glorious deeds and the consequences of the people's breaking of their covenant with God. Israel's history recounts many forms of the people's disloyalty to God, especially their idolatry (*Ps. 78:58*).

The psalmist, however, stresses the root of the Israelites' unfaithfulness: they forgot what God had done for them, did not trust God, put God to the test (*Ps. 78:18, 41, 56*), rebelled against Him, and failed to keep His law, His covenant, and His testimonies (*Ps. 78:10, 37, 56*). By stressing these specific forms of disloyalty, the psalmist implies that the rejection of Israel in history has resulted from one core sin, namely, the people's failure to trust the Lord (*Ps. 78:7, 8*).

When reading the psalm, one is overwhelmed with the people's constant stubbornness and spiritual blindness in contrast to the Lord's boundless patience and grace. How was each new generation so slow to learn?

Before we get overly judgmental of past generations, we should consider ourselves. Aren't we, also, forgetful of God's past wonders and neglectful of His covenantal requirements? The psalm does not encourage people to rely on their own deeds. Instead, Psalm 78 shows the futility of human will unless it is grounded in constant awareness of God's faithfulness and an acceptance of His grace. The unsuccessful battles of God's people (*Ps. 78:9, 62–64*) elucidate the psalm's lesson that human efforts apart from faithfulness to God are doomed to end in failure.

What lessons have you learned, or should have learned, from your past mistakes?

Remembering History and the Praise of God

Read Psalm 105. What historical events and their lessons are highlighted in this psalm?

Psalm 105 recalls key events that shaped the covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people Israel. It focuses on God's covenant with Abraham to give the Promised Land to him and his descendants, and how this promise, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, was providentially fulfilled through Joseph, Moses, and Aaron, and in the time of the conquest of Canaan. The psalm gives hope to God's people in all generations because God's marvelous works in the past guarantee God's unchanging love to His people in all times (*Ps. 105:1–5, 7, 8*).

Psalm 105 resembles Psalm 78 (see yesterday's lesson) in highlighting God's faithfulness to His people in history, and it does so in order to glorify God and to inspire faithfulness. However, unlike Psalm 78, Psalm 105 does not mention the people's past mistakes. This psalm has a different purpose.

Instead, history is retold in Psalm 105 through the lives of Israel's greatest patriarchs, showing God's providential leading and the patriarchs' patient endurance of hardships. The patriarchs' perseverance and loyalty to God were richly rewarded. Thus, Psalm 105 invites people to emulate the patriarchs' faith and trustingly wait on God's deliverance in their time.

Psalm 105 possesses a hymnal note (*Ps. 105:1–7*), showing that in order to truly praise God, God's people need to know the facts of their history. History provides both validation for our faith and countless reasons for praising God.

The worshipers are addressed as the seed of Abraham and children of Jacob (*Ps. 105:6*), thereby deeming them to be the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation (*Gen. 15:3–6*). The psalmist underscores the continuity between the patriarchs and the subsequent generations of God's people. The psalmist stresses that "His judgments are in *all the earth*" (*Ps. 105:7, NKJV*; emphasis supplied), thereby admonishing the worshipers not to forget that "our God" is also the sovereign Lord of the whole world and that His loving-kindness extends to all peoples (*Ps. 96:1, Ps. 97:1*). It is, clearly, a call to faithfulness to every generation of believers.

How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, see ourselves in this line of people, from Abraham on? (See Galatians 3:29.) What lessons should we learn from this history?

Remembering History and Repentance

Read Psalm 106. What historical events and their lessons are highlighted in this psalm?

Psalm 106 also evokes the major events in Israel's history, including the Exodus, sojourn in the wilderness, and life in Canaan. It stresses the heinous sins of the fathers that culminated in the generation that was carried into exile. Thus, the psalm almost certainly was written when the nation was in Babylon, or after they had returned home, and the psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recounted for God's people these historical incidents and the lessons that the people should have learned from them.

This psalm, too, as the others, points to God's faithfulness to His covenant of grace, by which He saved His people in the past (*Ps. 106:45*). It expresses hope that God will again show favor to His repentant people and gather them from among the nations (*Ps. 106:47*). The plea for present deliverance is not some wishful thinking but a prayer of faith based on the assurance of God's past deliverances (*Ps. 106:1-3*) and the unfailing character of God's faithfulness to His covenant with His people.

The recollection of Israel's historical failures in Psalm 106 is an integral part of the people's confession of their sins and acknowledgment that they are not better than their forefathers. The present generation admits that it is even worse than its ancestors because it knew the consequences of the past generations' iniquities and how God exercised His great patience and grace in saving them, even though they had deliberately walked in wicked ways in the past. If this were true for them, think about how much more so for us, today, who have the revelation of God's character and saving grace as revealed in Jesus and the Cross.

The good news of Psalm 106 is that God's steadfast love always prevails over the people's sins (*Ps. 106:8-10, 30, 43-46*). The key role of Moses and Phinehas in turning away God's wrath points to the significance of Christ's intercession on behalf of believers. Only personal experience of God's grace can transform a past story into *our* story.

Psalm 106:13 reads: "They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel" (NKJV). Why is that so easy for us to do in our own lives, as well?

The Parable of the Lord's Vine

Read Psalm 80. How are God's people portrayed in this psalm, and what great hope do they plead for?

Israel is portrayed as a vineyard that God uprooted from Egypt, the land of oppression, and transported to the Promised Land of abundance. The image of a vineyard conveys God's election of Israel and His providential care (*read also Gen. 49:11, 12, 22; and Deut. 7:7–11*).

However, in Psalm 80, God's vineyard is under His wrath (*Ps. 80:12*). The prophets announce the vineyard's destruction as the sign of God's judgment because the vine has turned bad (*Isa. 5:1–7, Jer. 2:21*).

However, Psalm 80 does not ponder over the reasons for divine judgment. Given the depths of God's grace, the psalmist is perplexed that God can withhold His presence from His people for such an extended time. The tension between God's wrath and judgment, on the one hand, and God's grace and forgiveness, on the other, causes the psalmist to fear that divine wrath may prevail and consume the people completely (*Ps. 80:16*).

Read Numbers 6:22–27. How is this blessing used by Psalm 80?

The psalm's refrain evokes Aaron's promise of God's perpetual blessing of His people (*Num. 6:22–27*) and highlights the hope that God's grace will triumph over the causes of the people's misery: "Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (*Ps. 80:3, NKJV; see also Ps. 80:7, 19, NKJV*).

The Hebrew word for "restore" here comes from a common word that means to "return," and it is used again and again in the Bible with God calling His people, who have wandered away, to return to Him. It is closely linked to the idea of repentance, of turning away from sin and back to God. " ' "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart" ' " (*Jer. 24:7, NKJV*).

How have you experienced for yourself repentance as a return to God?

The Lord's Supremacy in History

Read Psalm 135. What historical events are highlighted in the psalm? What lessons does the psalmist draw from them?

Psalm 135 summons God's people to praise the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness demonstrated in Creation (*Ps. 135:6, 7*) and in Israel's salvation history in the time of the Exodus (*Ps. 135:8, 9*) and in the conquering of the Promised Land (*Ps. 135:10–12*).

The Lord demonstrated His grace by choosing the people of Israel as His special treasure (*Ps. 135:4*). "Special treasure" conveys the distinctive covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people (*Deut. 7:6–11; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10*). The choosing of Israel was based on the Lord's sovereign will, and thus, Israel has no ground to feel superior over the other peoples. Psalm 135:6, 7 demonstrates that the Lord's sovereign purposes for the world did not begin with Israel but with the Creation. Therefore, Israel should humbly fulfill its assigned role in God's salvific purposes for the entire world.

The recounting of God's great deeds on behalf of His people (*Ps. 135:8–13*) culminates in the promise that God will "judge" His people and have compassion on them (*Ps. 135:14*). The judgment here is God's vindication of the oppressed and the destitute (*Ps. 9:4, Ps. 7:8, Ps. 54:1, Dan. 7:22*). The promise is that the Lord will uphold His people's cause and defend them (*Deut. 32:36*). Thus, Psalm 135 aims to inspire God's people to trust in the Lord and to remain faithful to their covenant with Him.

The Lord's faithfulness to His people leads the psalmist to affirm the nothingness of idols and to the unique supremacy of the Lord in the world (*Ps. 135:15–18*). Reliance on idols renders their worshipers as hopeless and powerless as their idols are (*Ps. 135:18*). The psalm demonstrates that God is to be praised as both Creator and Savior of His people. This is wonderfully conveyed in the two complementary versions of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (*Exod. 20:8–11, Deut. 5:12–15*). Because God's power in creation and history is unparalleled in the world, God's people should always rely on Him and worship Him alone. As our Creator and our Redeemer, He alone should be worshiped, and worship of anything else, or anyone else, is idolatry.

How can we make sure that we don't have idols in our own lives? Why might idolatry be easier to do than we realize?

Further Thought: Read Acts 7 and Hebrews 11. What does the New Testament say is the ultimate goal of God's sovereign leading of His people in history?

The historical psalms are a powerful witness to God's fidelity to His people. Each event in the history of God's people was a providential step leading toward the final fulfillment of the divine promise of the world's Savior in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Even the trials, which often perplexed God's people and made them think that God had abandoned them, were under God's sovereign control and part of His providence because God is the supreme Lord of history. The psalmist skillfully presents the truth that even the people's disloyalty cannot prevent God from keeping faith to His people and fulfilling His promises. However, the unrepentant individuals and groups were excluded from the covenantal blessings, and their infamous end serves as a lasting warning of how life without or opposed to God destroys people.

The Psalms encourage God's children in all times to hope in the Lord and remain faithful to Him. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

For God's people to go forward fearlessly, they need to know the facts of their history. Ellen G. White advises believers to read Psalms 105 and 106 "at least once every week."—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 98.

The history of God's people demonstrates that no promise that God has made in His Word will be left unfulfilled. This includes both divine promises of present individual care and future promises of Christ's second coming, which will establish God's kingdom of justice and peace on the new earth.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the blessings of remembering God's faithful leading of His people in history? What are the consequences of forgetting or ignoring the lessons of the past? How can we apply that same principle to us, as a church called to do the same thing that ancient Israel had been called to do?
- 2 How do the Psalms encourage us to recognize God's providential care in our life and to exercise patience and trust in God's sovereign ways, even when it's not easy to understand why things are happening as they are?
- 3 How can we make the study of the history of God's people more prominent in our personal and communal worship services? How can we be more intentional in telling our children about the more recent history of God's people?

No Work, No Food: Part 6

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After Sekule refused to work for several Sabbaths, his commanding military officer began to understand that he could not compel the young soldier to violate his conscience.

“So, you can’t work on the Sabbath in the army?” the officer said.

“That’s right. I can’t work on the Sabbath,” Sekule said.

“From Friday evening to Saturday evening?”

“Yes, I can’t work.”

“Then you can’t eat during those 24 hours.”

“Why can’t I eat?”

“If you’re not working, you don’t need to eat. Eating is working. Also, some of the food is prepared on your Sabbath, so you shouldn’t eat it.”

Sekule was eating only bread and drinking tea because the other military rations contained lard. But he agreed not to eat bread and drink tea that was prepared on the Sabbath. As a recently baptized Seventh-day Adventist, he wasn’t sure that food prepared on the Sabbath was off-limits. But he needed to give an answer that met the officer’s expectations. If he had refused to work but demanded bread and tea, the officer would think that he was being unfaithful to God.

Several months passed, and the military cooks began to cook one meal a week without lard. It was the only meal that Sekule could eat. But it was prepared and served only on the Sabbath.

Sekule prayed, “God, please, could You change the day from Sabbath to Sunday? Would You do that for me?”

He prayed for a month, and the lard-free meal was moved to Sunday.

Sunday happened to be a recreational day for the soldiers, a time when they could relax by playing soccer, basketball, and other sports. Sekule wished that the recreational day was on the Sabbath. It would be easier for him to refuse to play soccer than to refuse to work every Sabbath.

He prayed again. “I’m sorry, but could I ask You one more thing? Could You move the recreational day from Sunday to Sabbath so I don’t need to explain every Sabbath why I can’t work?”

A week after the lard-free meal was changed to Sunday, the recreational day suddenly was moved to Saturday.

SEKULE SEKULIĆ is an affluent entrepreneur and faithful Seventh-day Adventist in Montenegro. Read more of his story next week. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus’ soon coming in Montenegro and around the world.