

Favor
Psalm 85

Psalm 85:1 (NKJV) Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.

Some Psalms begin with “Lord” or “O Lord.” Often the name used is “Jehovah” (Yahweh). The letters YHWH were written without vowels because the name was considered too Holy to write or pronounce. And yet the Psalms do not hesitate to call on that name.

Psalm 85 begins with the name “Jehovah.” The Psalmist calls on the holy name of the Lord, the God of Israel. When Moses asked God His name, God said, “I AM WHO I AM.” The name Jehovah (Yahweh) is related to “I am that I am.” When God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM,” He pointed to His infinite, eternal nature. Another way of translating this phrase from Hebrew would be to say, “I AM THAT WHICH I AM.” God is making a point to Moses, the Israelites, and us. He is whatever He desires. Therefore, He is whatever His people need. Are His people lacking? He is Jehovah-Jira (the Lord our provider). Are His people in bondage? He is the Lord, our Deliverer. God does not change, but He is all we will ever need. He can meet any need. Our God is a mighty warrior and a Prince of Peace. He is a powerful judge and a loving Father. He is our Shepherd.

When the Psalmist says, “Lord,” he calls upon the One who is all things to all people. God is not a chameleon. Instead, He is a mighty rock and fortress to those who call on Him.

Addressing the Lord, the Psalmist says, “You have been favorable to Your land.” The Psalmist means that the Lord has accepted (been pleased with) His people.

The Lord is Lord of the whole earth. All peoples on earth belong to Him. However, God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. And, since that time, the nation of Israel has been known as God’s people. But, people being people, the relationship between God and the Israelites has been rocky from the beginning.

When the Lord sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt, they resisted and at times wanted to stone Moses. When the Lord wanted them to enter Canaan, they rebelled, and an entire generation died in the wilderness. They fought against the Lord and insisted on having a king so they could be like other nations. They constantly worshiped Idols, never doing away with them altogether.

During the period of their history known as “the Judges,” God repeatedly punished and then delivered His people. The nation would turn away from God and worship and serve idols. God would warn them, and they would ignore His warnings, even going as far as killing His prophets. God would be angry and punish His people by sending other nations to oppress them. After a period of suffering under their oppressors, the nation would repent and call on the name of the Lord. Then the Lord would raise up a deliverer (a judge). While the judge lived, the nation remained faithful to the Lord. But then, after a period of relative prosperity, the people would rebel, and the cycle began again.

This same cycle continues to this day. For almost nineteen hundred years, Israel did not exist as a nation even though those who were Israelites knew their heritage. In effect, they were in exile from the land God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have been watching another cycle in the cycle of the judges.

The Psalmist sees, through Scripture, a number of these cycles. And in them, He sees God’s mercy and goodness to His people. He sings of the favor the Lord shows toward His people and then says:

Psalm 85:1–3 (NKJV) ¹...You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.

²You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin.

Selah

³You have taken away all Your wrath;
You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.

In their history, the people of Israel rebelled against the Lord numerous times. And in response, the Lord gave them up into slavery or oppression. When they called upon the name of the Lord, He poured out His love and affection.

But the people soon forgot the grace and love of God and rebelled once again. However, each time the people rebelled, the punishment got more severe. For example, at the time of Samson, the Philistines oppressed the Israelites. However, the Israelites still lived in the land. Centuries later, God used the Babylonians to punish His people. In 586 BC, the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, removing them from the land. However, even this was not as severe as God's judgment when in 70 AD, Rome sacked Jerusalem and the land became known as Palestine for almost 1900 years.

Therefore, as the Psalmist praises the Lord for His kindness and forgiveness, He asks:

Psalm 85:4–7 (NKJV) ⁴Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.

⁵Will You be angry with us forever?

Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?

⁶Will You not revive us again,

That Your people may rejoice in You?

⁷Show us Your mercy, Lord,

And grant us Your salvation.

The love of God for His people and the favor He shows toward them caused God to “cover” their sins and iniquities. However, the Psalmist sees God's judgment in His people's continuing rebellion against God.

God will cover the iniquities of any person who calls on His name. He made His Son, Jesus, a sacrifice for our sins to free us from the bondage that accompanies sin. However, many do not believe. They do not accept the gift of eternal life that God paid for. So the wrath of God remains on them. This is what has happened to Israel. A remnant (a small number) trusts in the Lord and has received their Messiah. But, the majority do not believe. Like any nation, Israel has the full spectrum of spiritual beliefs and practices, including Islam, Buddhism, Christian, and secularism. The time of Jacob's trouble foretold in Scripture is yet to fall on modern Israel because of their continued refusal of Jesus, their Messiah.

The Psalmist understands this. The Psalmist looks at the past and prophetically sees the future, and asks:

Psalm 85:5 (NKJV) Will You be angry with us forever?

Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?

While the Psalmist opens the Psalm recognizing God's favor and forgiveness, He is troubled by the condition of the hearts of God's people. This question of "Will You be angry with us forever? is sandwiched between two pleas, "Restore us;" Revive us."

The Psalmist recognizes that if God does not change the hearts and minds of His people, they will never be saved. Therefore, he appeals to the Lord God to have mercy on His people and turn their hearts to Him.

Having made his appeal, the Psalmist listens. He says:

Psalm 85:8–9 (NKJV) ⁸I will hear what God the Lord will speak,
For He will speak peace
To His people and to His saints;
But let them not turn back to folly.
⁹Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.

God still loves His people, and he will speak peace to them. This is what verse nine tells us, and it is always true. Salvation is near to those who fear God. Because of His love and His willingness to forgive, salvation is never far from any one of us.

The Psalmist looks to the future and says:

Psalm 85:10–13 (NKJV) ¹⁰Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed.
¹¹Truth shall spring out of the earth,
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.
¹²Yes, the Lord will give what is good;
And our land will yield its increase.
¹³Righteousness will go before Him,
And shall make His footsteps our pathway.

"Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed." While these are *poetic* words, they are also *prophetic* words. The Lord will yet give what is good, and the land of Israel will yield its increase.

Look at what the Apostle Paul wrote about Israel.

Romans 11:1–5 (NKJV) ¹I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³“Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?” ⁴But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Romans 11:25–26 (NKJV) ²⁵For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved,

The salvation of all Israel is the subject of the ending verses of Psalm 85. A time is coming when God will establish the nation of Israel as chief among the nations and set the Prince of Peace on the throne. We are in the time of the Gentiles, and the fullness of the Gentiles has not come in yet. But when that number is complete, Righteousness and Peace will meet as Jesus takes the throne.

One thing is holding back the beginning of this time. God’s great love is holding back these events. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3).

God’s favor (God’s love) was shown in His willingness to forgive and restore Israel, and it is shown in His willingness to forgive and restore each of us. We see the expression of His love in what He did to make this all possible by giving His only Son. Although He was God, Jesus humbled Himself to become a man and live and die to pay the price for our sins.

Here’s how that works. The wages of sin is death. Jesus had no sin, but having an eternal, infinite nature, by His death He was able to pay the price for all the sins ever committed. All we have to do is accept that forgiveness.