Author:

King David wrote this Psalm. Except possibly for King Josiah (see 2 Kings 22:1-2 and 23:25), King David was the most godly king of ancient Israel.

Style of Psalm:

Psalm 103 is a song of wonderful praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and what He has done.

Sets a precedent

Psalm 103 sets a marvelous precedent for all Christian songwriters about how to teach people through songs about God’s character and actions.

Purpose

In the first verse, David states the purpose of Psalm 103 is to bless the Lord with everything that is within him. The Hebrew word for “bless” here is “barak” and basically means “praise”.

When verse 1 says “…bless His holy name”, it means praise God for His character and nature. In Hebrew Biblical thought, God’s Names reveal His character and nature. For example, God’s Names “Father”, “God Almighty”, “Lord”, “Master”, the “Holy One of Israel” and so on all reveal wonderful aspects of His character and eternal nature. This contrasts with the modern Western concept of names just being symbols to represent each person.

Background about David

When we read what David says here about God and how God had treated him and revealed God’s character, we can easily forget the historical background of David’s own life. When David says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name…and forget not His benefits” and then go on to list some of these marvelous benefits and talk about various wonderful aspects of God’s character, he says this in the context of all the difficulties, problems and sufferings he had been through in his own life.

If we do not relate David’s great hardships and problems to what he says in Psalm 103, his words will become like empty religious phrases or glib clichés.

Note some of the key events in David’s Life:
As a youth, he was extremely devoted to God. While he was young, God miraculously delivered him out of the paws of a lion and a bear (see 1 Samuel 17:37).

God commanded Samuel to anoint David as king even when David was only a youth (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13).

David was filled with the Holy Spirit on the same occasion (see 1 Samuel 16:13).

God empowered David to defeat in single combat the best fighter in the whole Philistine army (see 1 Samuel 17).

Saul then appointed David head of the Israelite army (see 1 Kings 18:5). God empowered David to continually defeat the Philistines.

David formed a very close friendship with Saul’s son Jonathon (see 1 Samuel 18:1-4).

But at this point of great God-given success and blessing, God permitted Saul to begin to make David’s life almost unbearable for a number of years. Motivated by jealousy and selfishness, Saul first became angry with David. This anger turned to hatred and attempted murder (see 1 Samuel 18:1-11).

1 Samuel 18:14 records: “And David behaved wisely in all his ways and the Lord was with him.” Despite this, Saul, motivated by his own wicked heart and an evil spirit, began to persecute David dreadfully in many ways.

David married Michal, Saul’s daughter. Michal loved David. But later while persecuting David, Saul took her off David and gave her to another man (see 1 Samuel 25:44). This would have been one of the greatest hurts of David’s life. He had not had sex before marriage. The only major sins he committed occurred later in relation to Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. 1 Kings 15:5 records: “because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matters of Uriah the Hittite.” This refers to David committing adultery with Uriah’s wife and murdering Uriah. One of the most hurtful things in life is to know your beloved wife or husband is having sexual intercourse with another person. Tragically some Christians over the centuries have had to face such a tragedy. This would have been especially hurtful to someone like David who had kept himself from sexual activities prior to his marriage.

Saul ordered his soldiers to continually hunt David for years, trying to murder him.

Despite David refusing to kill Saul when God gave Saul into his hands, Saul continued to hate him and seek his death (see 1 Samuel 24:1-25:44). David could have easily thought to himself: “I did not choose to be the future king. God chose me. Also, God is permitting Saul to continually hunt me down like an animal. I have acted with mercy and grace towards Saul twice now and all God has permitted in return is further suffering and great hardship.” But David did not criticise God’s character in this way.

Later the dreadful persecution of David stopped when Saul’s prophesied death occurred. But note this was the time David lost his best friend Jonathon (see 1 Samuel Chapter 31).

So David had now lost his wife and his best friend. Imagine the feelings of hurt and loneliness associated with this.

David remarried. But this did not prevent him from being seduced by a young married woman named Bathsheba who bathed naked right under his palace walls (see 2 Samuel 11:2).
She set him up by disobeying the Biblical teachings about modesty and nudity. Despite being seduced, God held David responsible for committing adultery with her (see 2 Samuel 11:27 and 12:1-15).

- David’s son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. This emotionally destroyed the poor young girl. 2 Samuel 13:20 records that after the rape: “Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom’s house.”
- David’s son Absalom then murdered Amnon (see 2 Samuel 13:23-33). David forgave Absalom for this (see 2 Samuel 14:33). But despite this, Absalom rebelled against David and led the nation into civil war (see 2 Samuel 15:1-18:18). David’s mercy and forgiveness did not result in Absalom changing his attitudes.
- Then despite David’s insistence that Absalom be not killed, Joab the army commander killed him (see 2 Samuel 18:5-15).

Main teachings of Psalm 103

1. Do not forget all God’s wonderful gifts to you
   In verse 2, David says “forget not all His benefits”. Because we go through many trials and problems (see Psalm 34:19), we can be easily tempted to forget all the marvelous natural and supernatural blessings which God has given us as free totally undeserved gifts.
   There is nothing wrong in honestly sharing with God your complaints. There are a large number of Psalms in which the authors communicate to God complaints about the sufferings, trials and problems they were experiencing. For example, see Psalm 38, 43, 73 and 88.
   But note after honestly sharing their complaints to God, Psalm-writers ended with expressions of faith, trust, praise, worship and thanks to Him.
   We should thank God for Who He is and what He has done despite the evil events and sufferings we experience (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

2. Examples of God’s undeserved gifts
   David then lists examples of God’s undeserved gifts:

   - He forgives all and not just some of the evil things we have thought, said and done. No matter how badly we have sinned, God desires to forgive us.
   - He heals our diseases.
   - He purchases our life from destruction. This was done on the basis of Jesus’ eternally preplanned death (see Acts 2:23, 4:28, 1 Peter 1:19-20 and Revelation 13:8).
   - He relates to us through two glorious aspects of His character – His lovingkindness and tender mercies.
   - He gives us many good natural blessings.

3. God is righteous and acts righteously
   Psalm 103 states: “The Lord executes righteousness…” God’s righteousness refers to the fact His nature, thoughts, feelings and actions are always right or correct.
   God’s righteousness refers to the fact His nature, thoughts, feelings and actions are always right or correct. God’s righteousness means He Himself is the final absolute or perfect
standard of what is right and just. What He is by nature is right. What He has decided is right is right and just is just. What is contrary to His nature is wrong. What He has determined is wrong is wrong and unjust is unjust. No one decided for God what is right and wrong, just and unjust.

God’s righteousness also refers to the fact all His commands, rewards and punishments are absolutely just and right and involve no favouritism towards anyone. (As we will see later in Chapter “Rewards 1”, some of God’s rewards are based to some degree on His unmerited grace also.)

Everything about God’s nature and acts is righteous or right. His nature and acts include His justice, faithfulness to His covenants, His saving grace, mercy, love, redemption of believers, reconciliation of believers to Himself, judgments, supreme rule and so on. So each of these are expressions of His righteousness. Therefore in a broad sense, God’s righteousness includes far more than His justice.

But note in many contexts in the Old Testament, God’s righteousness means solely His justice. God’s justice is an expression of His twin roles as Supreme Ruler and Judge. When God dispenses His justice, He does this not merely like a judge in a court. His Throne-room and Court-room are combined. Psalm 9:4 refers to God sitting “on the throne judging in righteousness.”

Note also everything God commands is absolutely right.

4. God executes justice for the oppressed

Verse 6 also says: “The Lord executes…justice for all the oppressed.” In Hebrew, the word “justice” is “mishpat” which means “judgment, justice, decision of the judge in a case of law” ¹ and therefore refers to any aspect of God’s supreme rule or government and judgments. God is the combined Supreme Ruler and Judge of every created being and thing.

In Hebrew, the word “oppressed” in verse 6 is the word “ashaq” which is related to “acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, the trampling and crushing of those lower in station”. ²

Therefore Psalm 103:6 teaches as Supreme Ruler, God acts many times through His justice and judgments on behalf of humans who are being oppressed by those in authority. God sometimes uses non-Christian or Christian political leaders to help the oppressed. At other times, when politicians rebel against what He wants, He uses His people to stand up for and help the oppressed. An example of this is what the Holy Spirit put into the heart of the prophet Micah in Micah 3:8-9: “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity.”

God delegates His authority to political leaders, parents, teachers, the police and many others (see Romans 13:1-7 and Ephesians 6:1-4). But He hates to see whenever someone in authority uses their position to oppress those under their authority.

Such oppression can involve many things, for example:

1. employers expecting employees to work extremely long hours for very poor wage rates and in dangerous or unhealthy working conditions while the employer is making a fortune (see

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¹ Brown, Driver and Briggs, “Hebrew and English Lexicon”, pages 1048-1049.
² Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 705.
Deuteronomy 24:14). James 5:1-5 states: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of the Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”

2. not helping genuinely needy poor people and widows (see Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Psalm 146:9 and 1 Timothy 5:16). James 1:27 states: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

3. paedophiles sexually seducing little boys and girls and teenagers.

Recently, the New South Wales State Parliament approved lowering the age of consent for homosexuals to 16 years. As a result now, if a mature-looking young boy of 14 or 15 years is sexually seduced by a paedophile who is then taken to court, the paedophile can plead he thought the boy was 16 and probably will be found innocent. Such laws while claiming to be based on justice and compassion, open a door for paedophiles to sexually abuse younger boys.

Amazingly in a memorandum to government Members on the subject “Age of Consent Bill”, N.S.W. Attorney General Bob Debus informed his readers that the age of consent for sexual relationships between males and males is \textit{14} in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein and Romania, \textit{13} in Korea and Spain and \textit{12} in the Netherlands and Malta.

Closet paedophiles in politics and the legal system in these above countries have achieved their purposes in having boys of 12 to 18 years legally available to cater to their sexual perversions. This is probably the next age targets for paedophiles in Australia – 15, then 14, then 13 and then 12.

Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit has inspired millions of Christians to oppose gladiator fighting, slavery, the neglect and abuse of the poor, sexual abuse of women and children, abortion, the murder of unwanted newborn babies, the shooting and raping of prisoners of war and many similar injustices. It is often taken centuries before the non-Christians listened and changed some of their wicked practices in these matters. But without Christians standing up about these issues, the world would have been a more wicked place.

Ezekiel 22:29-31, Micah 2:1-3 and Malachi 3:5 reveal that God promises to punish nations who continually sanction the oppression of groups like the poor, the needy, widows and orphans within them.

5. God is amazingly merciful and gracious

Verse 8 says: \textit{“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.”} God’s grace refers to His totally undeserved kindnesses to humans. His mercy means His tender compassion, pity and amazing kindness manifested towards undeserving humans in great need, suffering or misery.
Psalm 103:8 contains a fantastic recognition by someone living under the Old or Mosaic Covenant that:

- God is wonderfully merciful to people in great need.
- God is gracious to humans even though they do not deserve this.
- His mercy is not greatly limited but is instead abounding.

This is similar to the New Testament teaching on God’s grace and mercy. 1 Peter 5:10 calls God “the God of all grace.” The New Testament also refers to the “abundance of grace” (see Romans 5:17), “grace abounded” (see Romans 5:15 and 5:20), “exceeding grace of God” (see 2 Corinthians 9:14) and “exceeding riches of His grace” (see Ephesians 2:7). 1 Corinthians 1:3 calls God “the Father of mercies”. Ephesians 2:4 says God is “rich in mercy”.

Under both the Old or Mosaic and New Covenants, God’s grace and mercy should lead to repentance (see Romans 2:3-5) and godly right living (see Titus 2:11-14). Under both covenants, God opposes His people abusing His grace by them using it as an excuse for living a wicked life and having a careless attitude to known sin (see Jeremiah 7:9-11, Isaiah 1:11-17, Romans 6:1-2, 6:15 and Jude 4). In John 8:11, Jesus told the woman who was caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin NO MORE” and not “…go and deliberately sin some more”.

6. God’s mercy is one of His eternal characteristics

Psalm 103:17 says: “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.” Some people believe the false idea that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. They wrongly imagine that the God of the Old Testament was a God of judgment, vengeance, laws, rules, duties, little love and was lacking in grace and mercy, while the God of the New is one of total love, grace and no judgment or commands.

But such ideas are similar to those taught by the heretic Marcion the Gnostic in the 100’s A.D. He led many churchgoers into deception by teaching that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament.

God’s character is eternally the same. The change which occurred in the Bible between the Old and New Testament was a change of covenants. God replaced the Mosaic or Old Covenant with the New Covenant (see Hebrews 8:1-10:17).

7. God does not change but one of His covenants did

Contrary to what many churchgoers have been taught, the Old Testament has a very large number of verses which emphasise that God is gracious and merciful to people who do not deserve or merit it in any way. Psalm 145:9 says: “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”

Psalm 51:1 and 69:16 speak of “the multitude of Your tender mercies”. Psalm 136 constantly emphasises the eternal nature of God’s mercy when it repeats 26 times the phrase “for His mercy endures forever”. This same expression occurs 5 times in Psalm 118 and one each in 1 Chronicles 16:34, 16:41, 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, 7:6, 20:21, Psalm 106:1, 107:1 and Jeremiah 33:11. Deuteronomy 7:9, 1 Kings 8:23, Psalm 106:45 and Daniel 9:4 reveal the close link between God’s covenant and His mercy.
Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 106:7, 106:46, Isaiah 63:7 and Jonah 4:2 teach there is an abundance or multitude of God’s mercies. In Isaiah 54:10, God promises to never remove His “kindness” from His people. Lovingkindness is such a normal part of God’s character that in Psalm 144:2, David calls Him “my lovingkindness”.

In Daniel 9:18, the prophet Daniel showed that even under the Mosaic Covenant, we can approach God only on the basis of His undeserved mercies and not our good works or right actions: “O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.”


The Book of Hosea contains one of the most detailed and remarkable revelations in the whole Bible of God’s grace, mercy, kindness and love towards wicked undeserving people. It is true that the New Covenant is a relatively more gracious covenant than the Old or Mosaic Covenant (see John 1:16-17). But it is a gross error to teach that the God of the Old Testament is less gracious and merciful than the God of the New Testament.

But note the Old Testament contains:

1. God’s Covenant with Noah (see Genesis 8:20-9:17).
3. The Mosaic or Old Covenant (see the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

All of the above, except the Mosaic Covenant, continue in the times of the New Covenant. So there is much crossover of covenants between the Old and New Testament. Also God’s character never changes under any covenant, though some of His promises, instructions and actions may.

Also note that the covenants which God made with Noah, Abraham and David are just as packed with God’s grace and mercy to undeserving humans as the New Covenant.

It is important to understand the Bible very deeply unless we learn about each of God’s covenants, their similarities, their differences and which ones apply to us today. Many false teachings arise because of a lack of understanding of God’s covenants.

8. God does not give us what we deserve

In Romans 6:23, Paul said: “For the wages of sin is death…” This means that every person who sins even just once fully deserves:

a) to physically die immediately
b) to be eternally separated from God in hell.
In Genesis 2:16-17, God warned the first humans also that if they disobeyed His command, they would die. Romans 1:29-32 also declares that every person who does evil things deserves the punishment of death.

In Psalm 103:10, David states: “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” David understood that because of God’s amazing mercy and grace, He does not punish us as human beings immediately with the punishment of death which we fully deserve. God patiently and lovingly withholds the punishment which every person deserves. He does this to give them time to repent – have a change of mind and will about Him and their known sins – and to turn from their wicked intentions and actions to Him (see 2 Kings 17:13-14, Isaiah 55:7, Jeremiah 36:3, Ezekiel 18:21-23, Zechariah 1:3-4, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, 3:19 and 26, 5:31, 11:18, 20:21 and 26:19-20).

In Revelation 2:21, Jesus said how He gave a particular person “time to repent of her sexual immorality”. God gives every person on Earth a period of time in which they can find Him. Acts 17:26-27 states: “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

Sometimes when experiencing some type of great difficulty or problem, I have self-righteously and foolishly been tempted to pray: “God I do not deserve having to experience this problem. I have been faithful to you, devoted most of my spare time to your service and have done this and this and…Why have I had to face more than my fair share of problems and tragedies.” But such talk is wrong. God has been wonderfully gracious and kind to me, even though I really deserved the immediate punishment of death.

9. Differences between God’s deserved vengeance and His loving discipline

Psalm 103:10 refers to what is called the vengeance of the Lord in other verses. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 reveals God’s vengeance involves Him punishing people eternally by separating them from His presence. Psalm 94:1-7, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30-31 and Jude 7 refer also to the vengeance of God.

God’s vengeance is totally deserved. This is different from His loving discipline of His sons and daughters. 1 Corinthians 11:29-34 refers to God lovingly disciplining or punishing believers to lead them to turn from their sins so they do not end up turning from Him and being condemned with the world. Hebrews 12:5-11 and Revelation 3:19 also mention God’s loving discipline of His treasured children.

10. Full forgiveness under all of God’s covenants

Another common error is the teaching that believers in the Old Testament did not have their sins fully forgiven like New Covenant believers. But note verses like Psalm 103:3 and 12 reveal God fully forgave them.

The animal sacrifices Israelite believers made were not effective themselves but were symbols pointing to Jesus’ future eternally planned death (see Hebrews 10:1-14). His death provided the basis of the forgiveness of all believers under every covenant and in every time period.
11. God is slow to anger

In verse 8, David declares: “The Lord is... slow to anger...” This verse means that God is slow to manifest His anger against unbelievers and the evil and wickedness in the world.

God is actually angry with unrepentant unbelievers every moment of every day. Psalm 7:11 states: “God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.”

In Ephesians 2:3, Paul calls unbelievers “children of wrath”. God’s wrath is the inflexible, active opposition of a good and holy God to all evil, wickedness and associated rebellion to His rule and His anger towards those unbelievers who refuse to turn from their sins to Him.

God is not only very angry about every sin. John 3:36 reveals He is also angry with people – those who reject Jesus Christ: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” In Greek, the word “abides” here is a form of the word “meno” which means in the context of John 3:36 “figuratively of someone who does not leave the realm or sphere in which he finds himself: remain, continue, abide”. 3 So God’s anger continues or remains on those who do not believe in Christ.

Romans 5:10 shows unbelievers are regarded as God’s enemies. This relates to His wrath mentioned in Romans 5:9. In Psalm 5:5-6 and 11:5-6, David teaches that God abhors sinful unbelievers. These verses refer to the fact God sets Himself against unrepentant unbelievers, opposes them, separates Himself from them and regards them as His enemies. This is despite the wonderful truth God still loves them (see John 3:16 and Romans 5:8).

In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul states that everyone who does not sincerely love Jesus Christ is under God’s curse: “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed...!” Matthew 22:1-7 and Luke 14:16-21 record parables about God being furious with those who rejected His invitation into His Kingdom. See Matthew 22:7 especially.

12. A good God must hate evil and be angry about it

Because God is perfectly loving and gracious, some churchgoers reject the idea that He is also angry about all sin and evil. But God would not totally love good right things unless He also hated all evil wrong things and was angry with those who do the latter things. If God was not very angry about rapes, murders, bashings, child molesting, burglaries and all other forms of wickedness and with those doing these things, He would not be a perfectly loving and good God.

13. The relationship between the Gospel and God’s wrath

One popular view today teaches that God’s wrath has no connection to the Gospel of grace. This view claims God’s wrath and the Gospel are opposite and totally separate. But note Paul taught in Romans 1:16-18 that the Gospel and God’s wrath are connected. The Gospel itself teaches us that because of our sin, everyone of us deserves to experience God’s future wrath in being eternally condemned to hell in a state of permanent separation from Him. The Gospel also reveals that God has appointed Jesus Christ as our substitute. Christ experienced the fury of God’s anger against us as sinners and our sin when He willingly died on the Cross.

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3 Bauer, page 503.
The Gospel also stresses that anyone who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is still under God’s wrath (see John 3:36).

14. Is God angry with unbelievers during the New Covenant period?
Many Christians have been taught the false idea that God is never ever angry with sinful unbelievers during the graceful New Covenant period. They say His anger toward sinful unbelievers only occurred in Old Testament times and will occur in future during the Great Tribulation. Such ideas are contrary to Paul’s words in Romans 1:18-19: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness…” These verses show God is very angry about and actively opposed to every form of evil and wrong. God does not overlook even the smallest sin of unbelievers.

In the broader context of Romans 1:18-31, the phrase “is revealed” is used by Paul in Romans 1:18 in the sense of God’s wrath or present continuous inflexible opposition and intense hatred of all sin and wickedness being revealed or manifested to humans. Such wrath from heaven can either be being revealed to human hearts by the Holy Spirit or can on occasion be being manifested in present earthly punishments. Acts 12:20-23, 1 Thessalonians 2:16 and Revelation 2:20-23 are three examples of the latter.

Note the expression “is revealed” in Romans 1:18 is in the present tense in Greek. In Greek, the present tense usually refers to an ongoing or continuous action. If it was in the future tense, this would probably mean Paul was referring solely to the manifested wrath of God associated with Jesus’ future Second Coming and the Final Judgment Day. But Paul does not use the future tense of “is revealed” in Romans 1:18. Paul wrote these words about God’s wrath in Romans 1:18 to refer to the period he was then presently living in – the New Covenant dispensation of grace and of the Holy Spirit – and possibly also to God’s future wrath associated with Christ’s Second Coming and the Final Judgment.

15. True believers are not under God’s wrath
Those people who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour by faith, are not under God’s furious wrath (see Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 and 5:9).

Note when Paul teaches in Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9 that Jesus’ death has delivered believers from God’s future furious wrath, Paul is not saying God does not care if believers sin. God is very displeased when believers sin (see Revelation 2:4-5, 2:14, 2:16, 2:20 and 2:22-23). He hates all sin. He does not like looking at evil being done (see Habakkuk 1:13). But His being displeased with the sins of believers is different from Him having furious anger towards them which will manifest itself in eternal punishment.

16. All believers should fear God
In verses 11, 13 and 17, David mentioned the importance of fearing God. Fearing Him involves:

- reverencing Him
- respecting Him
- having a great awe of Him and how superior He is to us (see Psalm 33:8)
- honouring and submitting ourselves to Him
• having a healthy dread of the tragic possibility of abandoning Him and as a result being punished by Him (see Luke 12:4-5 and Hebrews 10:26-31).

Jesus Christ is our perfect example (see 1 John 2:6). Isaiah 11:3 prophesied about Him: “His delight is in the fear of the Lord…”

One common error to avoid is the idea that loving God is only a New Testament concept and fearing God is just a Mosaic Covenant practice. True believers under the Mosaic Covenant loved God (see Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 6:5 10:12, 11:1, 13:3, 30:6, 30:20, Psalm 18:1, 27:4, 69:36, 116:1, 145:20 and Daniel 9:4). The New Testament commands New Covenant believers to fear God (see Acts 10:34-36, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Colossians 3:22, Hebrews 12:28-29, 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:17). Acts 9:31 reveals that the early church grew in numbers while emphasising the fear of the Lord: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”

Two of the main signs we fear the Lord are we will hate evil and will be keen to turn from evil. Proverbs 8:13 states: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil…” Proverbs 16:6 says: “…And by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.”

17. Obedience to God’s commandments is a fruit of faith under all covenants

Psalm 103:18 states: “To such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.” Here David says that keeping God’s covenant was associated with obeying His commandments. Some think this meant David was teaching that those under the Mosaic Covenant could be justified or declared righteous before God by meriting this through obedience to the Ten Commandments and other commands found in the Mosaic Covenant and Law.

But this is totally wrong. In the context of Psalm 103:18, David was referring to believers like Him who had had their sins or disobediences to the Mosaic Law totally forgiven by God’s undeserved grace and mercy (see verses 3, 4, 10 and 11-12) and whom God instructed to obey His commands as a fruit of their faith and not as a means of meriting God’s grace.

Acts 13:39, Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16 emphasise that no human has ever been declared righteous by God through their obediences to the Mosaic Law. Only Jesus perfectly obeyed the Mosaic Law (see Matthew 5:17).

Through the influence of humanism and worldly unbiblical philosophies in the Church worldwide, some say that God does not have commands under the New Covenant except to love. For example, the American liberal minister Joseph Fletcher taught that it was okay to commit adultery, steal and have sex before marriage as long as you have some supposedly “loving” purpose. But this is unbiblical because:

• In Romans 13:8-10, Paul shows that true love obeys God’s other commandments against adultery, murder, stealing, being greedy and so on.
• In the New Testament, Jesus and the Apostles frequently referred to Christians obeying God’s commandments (see Matthew 26:20, Luke 17:10, Acts 10:33, Romans 13:9, 1 Corinthians 7:19, 14:37 and Ephesians 6:2) and did not say these were just flexible suggestions which we could choose to obey or not depending on the situation. Note the
Greek word “diatasso” used in Luke 17:9, 17:10, 1 Corinthians 7:17, 9:14 and 16:1 means “order, direct, command”⁴ or to give detailed instructions to what must be done.⁵

The Greek word “paragello” in 1 Corinthians 11:17, 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10 means “give orders, command”⁶ or “announce what must be done”.⁷ The Greek word “entole” used in 1 Corinthians 14:37 means “order”⁸ or “that which is authoritatively commanded”.⁹ In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul declared: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”

In Acts 10:33, Peter stated: “So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” In Greek, the word “commanded” is “protasso” which means “to give detailed instructions as to what must be done”¹⁰ and “command, order”.¹¹

Romans 14:1-23 reveals that God’s standards are not absolute about some things like whether to eat meat or to regard certain days as holy to the Lord. But many of God’s commands are black and white absolute standards with no exceptions to them sanctioned in the Bible.

18. Changes in God’s commands among His covenants

Some Christians wrongly believe that none of God’s commands change. The truth is however that:

1. God’s commands about murder, adultery, sex before marriage, stealing, lying, honouring your parents, idolatry, homosexuality, bestiality, rape, occult, witchcraft, sorcery, caring for the poor, looking after widows and orphans, modesty and nudity are the same under the Mosaic and New Covenants.

2. One of God’s commands under the Abrahamic Covenant – the command about circumcision – no longer applies under the new Covenant (see Genesis 17:10-14, Galatians 5:6 and 6:15).

3. Some of the commands of the Mosaic Covenant only applied to the nation of Israel and not to New Covenant believers. Examples of these are:

   - Men’s hair could not be cut at their sides (see Leviticus 19:27).
   - Men’s beards could not be clipped (see Leviticus 19:27).
   - We could not eat ham and other pig products (see Leviticus 11:7).
   - We could not eat any sea creature without fins and scales, for example crabs, mussels, oysters and prawns (see Leviticus 11:9).

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⁶ Bauer, page 613.
⁷ Louw and Nida, page 426.
⁸ Bauer, page 269.
⁹ Louw and Nida, page 426.
¹¹ Bauer, page 718.
• We would have to stone people who committed certain sins (see Leviticus 20:27, 24:14, Deuteronomy 13:10, 17:5, 21:21 and 22:24).
• Slavery would be permitted (see Leviticus 23:39-55).
• Leviticus 21:9 commands that if a daughter of a Levitical priest committed sexual immorality, God’s people must burn her to death. If this command was carried over to New Testament times and applied to the families of church leaders, we would have to burn to death minister’s and pastor’s daughters who were involved with sex outside marriage.
• A wife, who grabbed the genitals of a man who is fighting her husband would have her hand cut off (see Leviticus 25:12).
• Bride prices or dowries would have to be given to parents (see Exodus 22:16-17).
• Wives accused of adultery would have to go through a ceremony in which the priest pronounced a curse on them which would be effective if they had committed this sin (see Numbers 5:11-31).
• Any woman who was having her monthly period would be regarded as unclean during this time. Everything she touched or sat on would be unclean (see Leviticus 15:19-20). Anyone who touched her bed or anything she sat on would be unclean also (see Leviticus 15:21-23). She and those who were made unclean by her would be excluded from church meetings during the time of their uncleanness.
• All new brides would have to show evidences of virginity on the bedclothes which were used when they and their new husbands first had sexual intercourse (see Deuteronomy 22:13-21). These bedclothes were often kept as proof. Women who failed this test would be stoned (see Deuteronomy 22:20-21). As a result, in modern Western societies those churchgoers who had backslidden for a time and committed fornication and most new converts would have to be stoned.
• Our rebellious sons would have to be stoned (see Leviticus 21:18-23). They would not be given counselling or shown any mercy at all.
• Guidance could be obtained from God through the Urim and Thummin which was on the breastplate of the High Priest’s clothes (see Exodus 28:30 and Numbers 27:21). We would need Israelite Levite High Priests for this.
• We would have to put tassels on our clothes (see Numbers 15:37-41).
• We could not wear clothes with mixed fabrics such as cotton and nylon (see Deuteronomy 22:11).
• We could not sow different kinds of seed in our vineyards (see Deuteronomy 22:9).
• We would have to slay all unbelievers and false prophets in our midst (see Deuteronomy 13:1-18). Would this also lead to the killing of all those whom we regarded as heretics, even if they disagreed with us only about minor matters?

4. God added some new commands to the New Covenant. Examples of these are water baptism (see Mark 10:16 and Acts 2:38), holy communion (see Luke 22:14-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34) and leadership by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (see Ephesians 4:11-12).

5. Some commands of the Mosaic Covenant have been amended under the New Covenant. For example, the easier attitude to divorce found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 has been changed under the New Covenant (see Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-9 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-16).
Men’s hair could not be cut at their sides (see Leviticus 19:27).
Men’s beards could not be clipped (see Leviticus 19:27).
We could not eat ham and other pig products (see Leviticus 11:7).
We could not eat any sea creature without fins and scales, for example crabs, mussels, oysters and prawns (see Leviticus 11:9).
We would have to stone people who committed certain sins (see Leviticus 20:27, 24:14, Deuteronomy 13:10, 17:5, 21:21 and 22:24).
Slavery would be permitted (see Leviticus 23:39-55).
Leviticus 21:9 commands that if a daughter of a Levitical priest committed sexual immorality, God’s people must burn her to death. If this command was carried over to New Testament times and applied to the families of church leaders, we would have to burn to death minister’s and pastor’s daughters who were involved with sex outside marriage.
A wife, who grabbed the genitals of a man who is fighting her husband would have her hand cut off (see Leviticus 25:12).
Men could have two wives (see Deuteronomy 21:15). In his writing “Antiquities” (Book 4, Chapter 8, 249), the Jewish historian Josephus refers to Jewish men having two wives in the period around the time of the Apostles.
Men could have second-class slave wives called concubines (see Exodus 21:7-11 and Leviticus 19:20).
The brothers of husbands who have died and whose wives did not have children must marry them in order to provide them with children (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). They must do this regardless of whether they already have a wife or whether they like each other or not.
A female captive of war could be taken as a wife regardless of whether she wanted this (see Deuteronomy 21:10-14). Such captives would have to perform a ceremony-like routine before becoming believers’ wives (see Deuteronomy 21:12-13).
Bride prices or dowries would have to be given to parents (see Exodus 22:16-17).
Wives accused of adultery would have to go through a ceremony in which the priest pronounced a curse on them which would be effective if they had committed this sin (see Numbers 5:11-31).
Husbands and wives who have sexual intercourse would be regarded as unclean until evening (see Leviticus 15:16-18). They would not be allowed into church meetings during such times of uncleanness. Unclean people were not allowed into the Temple.
Any woman who was having her monthly period would be regarded as unclean during this time. Everything she touched or sat on would be unclean (see Leviticus 15:19-20). Anyone who touched her bed or anything she sat on would be unclean also (see Leviticus 15:21-23). She and those who were made unclean by her would be excluded from church meetings during the time of their uncleanness.
All new brides would have to show evidences of virginity on the bedclothes which were used when they and their new husbands first had sexual intercourse (see Deuteronomy 22:13-21). These bedclothes were often kept as proof. Women who failed this test would be stoned (see Deuteronomy 22:20-21). As a result, in modern Western societies those churchgoers who had backslidden for a time and committed fornication and most new converts would have to be stoned.
Our rebellious sons would have to be stoned (see Leviticus 21:18-23). They would not be given counselling or shown any mercy at all.

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We would have to put tassels on our clothes (see Numbers 15:37-41).

We could not wear clothes with mixed fabrics such as cotton and nylon (see Deuteronomy 22:11).

We could not sow different kinds of seed in our vineyards (see Deuteronomy 22:9).

We would have to slay all unbelievers and false prophets in our midst (see Deuteronomy 13:1-18). Would this also lead to the killing of all those whom we regarded as heretics, even if they disagreed with us only about minor matters?
PSALM 103 – PRAISE FOR THE LORD’S MERCIES

- The author is King David
- Psalm 103 is a song of wonderful praise to God for who He is and what He has done
- This Psalm sets a marvelous precedent for Christian songwriters
- Main purpose:
  to praise God for His character and nature (verse 1)
- Background about David

The main teachings of Psalm 103

1. Do not forget all God’s wonderful gifts to you (verse 2)
2. Examples of God’s undeserved gifts:
   a) forgiveness (verse 3)
   b) healing (verse 3). For example, personal healings of knee, flu and melanoma
   c) redemption from eternal destruction (verse 4)
   d) God’s lovingkindness and tender mercies (verse 4)
   e) Many good natural blessings (verse 5)
3. God is righteous (verse 6)
4. God executes justice (verse 6)
5. God is amazingly merciful and gracious
6. God’s mercy – an eternal characteristic (verse 17)
7. God does not change but one of His covenants did
8. God does not give us what we deserve (verse 10)
9. God’s deserved vengeance and His loving discipline
10. Full forgiveness under all God’s covenants
11. God is slow to anger (verse 8)
12. A good God must hate evil and be angry about it
13. All believers should fear God (verses 11, 13 and 17)
14. Obedience to God’s commands is a fruit of faith under all covenants
15. Changes in God’s commands among His covenants