

Psalm 103 – Study Guide¹

“Worship is experiencing God in one’s innermost being – all that I am responding to all that he is. This is every believer’s glorious occupation.”²

One of the chief ends of our studying the Psalms is to make us better worshipers of God and more fruitful in our praying. To accomplish this, we must better understand God, man, creation, and the dynamic relationships between all of these. The various psalms that we have studied to present have provided frameworks to understand, obey, and fear God. The assortment of the contexts of the Psalms have placed us alongside the psalmist in perilous trials and joyful victories. Occasionally we have also studied Psalms that are unqualified joy and worshipful celebration. Psalm 103 is among those worshipful celebration psalms and operates as a primer for making its readers and students people of great worship, to demand that they recall the magnificent workings and character qualities of God to the end that they cannot help but join David, the angels, and indeed all creation in blessing The LORD!

May The LORD give us the grace to see the beauty of Psalm 103 clearly enough that we might join in David’s worship celebration, and also upon reflecting on our own contexts that have abounded in great mercy, grace, and steadfast love may we join in our own celebrations too. Hear, heed, and join the call to bless The LORD, O my soul.

Structure and Outlines

David Crowe

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| 103:1-5 | David’s exhortation to bless The LORD followed by a priming of the soul to this end.
103:1-2 David calling on himself to bless The LORD.
103:3-5 David expressing and then identifying The LORD’s benefits. |
| 103:6-9 | Testimony to the character of the God worthy of blessing.
103:6-7 The historic demonstration of The LORD’s righteousness and justice.
103:8-9 The LORD’s gracious disposition toward his own. |
| 103:10-14 | God’s gracious and salvific restorative disposition toward men who fear him.
103:10-12 The LORD’s salvation for those who fear him.
103:13-14 The LORD’s compassion for those who fear him. |
| 103:15-19 | Temporal man who fears God enjoys the magnificent blessings of the eternal and heavenly King.
103:15-18 The temporal nature of man in contrast to the eternal love of God on those who fear him.
103:19 The LORD is sovereign ruler over all. |
| 103:20-22 | A finale of exhortations for the supernatural and natural works of God to join David in blessing The LORD!
103:20-21 Exhortation for the angels to join in blessing The LORD!
103:22 All creation is called upon to bless The LORD!
103:22 David again calling on himself to bless The LORD. |

ESV Study Bible³

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| 103:1-2 | Bless the Lord, O My Soul, and Do Not Forget His Benefits. |
| 103:3-19 | The Benefits. |
| 103:20-22 | Let All Creation Join in Blessing the Lord. |

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray’s Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pg.146

³ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.1067-1069

While some outlines are structured more simply than others for a variety of reasons, it was interesting to me that 103:3-19 were one large point. In my own efforts at seeing the pieces and the whole I did mark off the individual units as noted above, but I also saw a unit with 103:6-14 and an even larger unit (similar to this conclusion) of 103:6-19, but I do see 2-5 as a foundational framework that is distinct from the larger whole that breaks it down.

John MacArthur⁴

- I. A Call for Human Praise (103:1-19)
 - A. Personally (103:1-5)
 - B. Corporately (103:6-19)
- II. A Call for Creation's Praise (103:20-22b)
 - A. Angels (103:20-21)
 - B. Works of Creation (103:22a-b)
- III. A Refrain of Personal Praise (103:22c)

Keil & Delitzsch⁵

103:1-5
 103:6-10
 103:11-14
 103:15-18
 103:19-22

Willem VanGemen⁶

- A Individual Praise (vv.1-2)
 - B Praise for the Lord's Goodness to Individuals (vv.3-5)
 - B' Praise for the Lord's Kingship over Israel (vv.6-19)
- A' Universal and Individual Praise (vv.20-22)

Steven Lawson⁷

103:1-2	The Rejoicing of Praise
	103:1
	103:2
103:3-19	The Reasons for Praise
	103:3-5
	103:6-7
	103:8-9
	103:10-12
	103:13-14
	103:15-16
	103:17-19
103:20-22	The Reinforcement of Praise
	103:20
	103:21
	103:22

⁴ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.833

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pgs.647-648

⁶ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg.755

⁷ Lawson, pgs.147-149

Arnold Rhodes⁸

103:1-5	Praise for Personal Blessings
103:6-18	Praise for National Blessings
103:19-22	Praise for All Creation

Derek Kidner⁹

103:1-5	Personal praise
103:6-14	Wayward family, gentle Father
103:15-18	Fading life, eternal love
103:19-22	Praise from all creation

Header

We know that the Psalm is credited to David, but are provided no historical context. However, what we do know is that the psalm as a whole is incredibly joyful and zealous in directing one's worshipful affections and thanksgiving to God.

Regarding Psalm 103's Davidic authorship and overall content Derek Kidner provided a very helpful statement that helps one appreciate the union of the authorship and content here. "Among the psalms attributed to David, Psalm 103 stands a little apart: it is less intensely personal than most of his; less harassed, if at all, by enemies or private guilt. The personal note is there, but David is soon speaking for us all. It is a hymn rather than a private thanksgiving, and we are reminded that David was the founder of the great choirs of Israel."¹⁰

103:1-5 David's exhortation to bless The LORD followed by a priming of the soul to this end.

103:1-2 David calling on himself to bless The LORD.

The opening of the psalm calls out to bless The LORD! David summons his whole self to its chief end and purpose - to bless or make much of his great God. Then, as to emphasize this even further he calls on his whole inward man to participate in this worshipful adoration of God and specifically his holy name.

As is readily apparent from even a cursory reading of the text, "blessing The LORD" is a strong thematic element of Psalm 103 and is really the one that holds and binds the whole psalm together being present three times in 103:1-2 and then again four times in 103:20-22. Each usage being "Bless the LORD" except for one occurrence where a pronoun stands in for LORD and his name is emphasized by indirect reference/usage "Bless *his* holy name" (103:1).

Because of the precise emphasis in the repeated charge to "Bless The LORD" in 103:1 on The LORD's holy name it is proper to again consider two matters: what does it mean to bless The LORD and what does it mean to specifically bless his holy name?

Bless The LORD

Blessing The LORD is stated to be, "...a grateful expression of acknowledgement of his blessing, hence praise."¹¹ It is much less frequent to see someone declaring that they are blessing The LORD verses being blessed or even blessing others, but it appears to be a particularly exuberant praise in a context of thanksgiving (delivery, provision, special care).¹²

Bless The LORD: "...to speak well of him for his abundant generosity."¹³

⁸ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pgs.141-142

⁹ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 2008. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs.397-400

¹⁰ Kidner, Pg.397

¹¹ VanGemeren, Pg.190

¹² These observations were first recorded in our study of Psalm 16.

¹³ ESV SB, Pg.1067

Frequently when it is used throughout the Old Testament Scriptures toward God it is a response of exuberant praise and thanksgiving, acknowledging God's kindness, mercy, and/or magnificent works toward the beneficiary. The pattern of blessing The LORD increases substantially in the Psalms, which is consistent with testimonies of praise and thanksgiving to God.¹⁴

For further study of this subject I would direct your attention to another Psalm of David that is very similar in thematic content and in declaring the blessing of God, Psalm 145.

Blessing The LORD's holy name

Whereas on a simple level we identify people by their name, on a more meaningful level we also appreciate the value of "a good name" or all that is summoned to mind with the utterance or consideration of one's name. It is this later usage that is being brought to our attention here. As Willem VanGemeran states, "The 'name' of the Lord calls to remembrance all of his perfections and acts of deliverance."¹⁵

Arnold Rhodes affirms this too, stating, "To 'bless his holy name' is essentially to 'bless the LORD,' since his name stands for all that he has revealed himself to be in his holiness or 'godness.'"¹⁶

The LORD's "holy name"

Because one's name identifies character and effectively the history of the actions that reveal and support the understanding of their character it is valuable to see that here it is The LORD's "holy name" that is being concentrated upon. A familiar and important theme present in the Scriptures – one that demands to be understood and appreciated if one is to ever know and properly worship God.

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| 1 Chronicles 16:10,35 | When the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the City of David and King David established worship in its presence there are two references to The LORD's holy name in this celebratory song: the charge to "glory in his holy name" and a prescribed petition requesting that "we may give thanks to your <i>holy name</i> ." |
| 1 Chronicles 29:16 | David blesses The LORD and speaks to The LORD regarding the materials that The LORD has provided for them to accumulate in the preparing to build him a house for his " <i>holy name</i> ." |
| Ezekiel 36:22 | After addressing Israel's abuse of his <i>holy name</i> The LORD states that he is about to act by providing them magnificent restoration including restoring them to the land, cleaning them from their idolatry, putting a new heart and spirit within them, and he will remove their heart of stone - replacing it with a heart of flesh. This is all done for the sake of <i>his holy name</i> . Israel is the beneficiary of God's magnificence being put on display. |
| Ezekiel 39:25 | Continuing to speak in the context of restoration, The LORD states that he will be jealous for <i>his holy name</i> . |

Finally, note that giving proper esteem and attention to The LORD's holy name is the exemplary application of the third commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:7) - it is the absolute opposite of taking The LORD's name in vain, rather it is affirming, adorning, and exalting it!

Sidebar: David's talking to his soul for what reason?

I am not persuaded to a conclusion that some allude to that David is seeking to speak properly to his soul amidst a dark, gloomy, or challenging time. We simply have no such information and contextually it would appear to be a rather direct exhortation to worship and bless The LORD, particularly as there is no reference to inward or outward struggle beyond the common experience of sin and needing forgiveness. However, regarding this summoning of his soul to bless God, is this not a proper exhortation and practice that all should embrace to maintain a proper heart in worship? Should we not daily be speaking truth to both our souls and one another not just when we need recalibration but to keep true always?

As we have stated David starts off with a duplication of "Bless The LORD, O my soul" and now we observe that he then goes to an exhortation that fuels this charge: forget not all his benefits. David then goes on to list and identify these

¹⁴ I identified that this occurs approximately 42 times in the Psalms.

¹⁵ VanGemeran, Pg.756

¹⁶ Rhodes, Pg.142

benefits from 103:3-5 (continuing one long sentence securing the breadth of this one thought), and as we will see the grounds for his exhortation is the kind works of The LORD.

Here we also begin to see that a worshipful response to the magnificent works of God is reflected in not forgetting but declaring and affirming these truths. To this end VanGemeren drew a helpful conclusion that, "The opposite of 'praise' is 'forgetfulness.'"¹⁷

Praise is not simply a reflexive response to remembering, but it is fueled by remembering and it properly exalts that which is recalled which is what we are doing in the act of worship – we are remembering, thanking, proclaiming and affirming the marvelous works and character of God.

103:3-5 David expressing and then identifying The LORD's benefits.

The benefits of The LORD toward his beloved that David expresses in 103:3-5 are: he forgives, he heals, he redeems, he extends steadfast love, he has mercy, and he satisfies with good.

The first benefit expressed, and rightfully so, is that The LORD forgives all their iniquities. This benefit demands a measure of pause and attention. All iniquity forgiven. All injustices, offenses, and rebellious conduct against The LORD of glory whose holiness and righteousness demands proper justice is forgiven. Just how this absolution of sin is secured is further articulated throughout the psalm and its completeness, as we will see, is beautifully expressed in 103:12.

The LORD who forgives. It is so amazing to see the clear pattern articulated in Leviticus where the Covenant People of God were directed in how to carry out their sacrificial system and thereby enjoy its benefits, including forgiveness. Observe the pattern:

Leviticus 4:20	"...and he shall be forgiven the sin that he has committed."
Leviticus 4:26	"So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 4:31	"And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 4:35	"And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 5:10	"And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 5:13	"Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 5:16	"And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 5:18	"...and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven."
Leviticus 6:7	"And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty."
Leviticus 19:22	"And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed."

Now, note Psalm 51:16-17 "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." I include this and would direct your attention to Romans 2-5 and even the book of Hebrews as a whole to press us one and all to understand that it was not the act of Temple sacrifice or any other measure of keeping and fulfilling the Law that justifies or provides forgiveness *in and of itself*, but the act's manifestation of a broken dependence on God, an act of faith that God will do as he has promised and here he has promised to forgive those who in this season of Redemptive History faithfully (and as David made plain, with a proper heart) execute these elements of the sacrificial requirements of the Law. So with this balance in mind, again give attention to the words of David when he speaks of the benefits of The LORD which include forgiveness. An unimaginably magnificent grace that must compel any soul that properly grasps it to bless The LORD!

¹⁷ VanGemeren, Pg.756

This Covenant People are being summoned to remember, as we too must summon one another to remember, the wonder of God's forgiveness.

Sidebar: Forgiven! How?

Justification by faith alone was not a new concept that was birthed out of the Protestant Reformation or even the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament.

All believers are and have been justified before God by faith in God and his sure word. Further, justification's residual advantages are being absolutely forgiven (past and future offenses) and therefore affording one the ability to enjoy fellowship with God. It must also be understood that, as so clearly demonstrated with Abraham, justification was a point in time event. Therefore, to require residual sacrifices to secure a justified (or declared righteous) status before God would be a works based scandal rather than how they should be understood – as acts of residual obedience demonstrating a genuine and effectual work in the heart of the one who knows and fears God.¹⁸

From the most consequential (forgiveness of sins) to the important, but comparatively mundane we see that The LORD heals diseases. This immediately demonstrates the substantial and generous range of the works of God. David blesses The LORD who heals, who not only restores the soul before him, but also chooses to restore the natural body, often to keep it from disease and at other times to free it from the burden of disease.

This is one conclusion. However, this statement does provide a degree of charitable differences. This is in part because several of the verses throughout Psalm 103 appear to have a degree of parallelism to them – enforcing the same idea in the second line or complementing it with a like statement. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the reference to healing/disease is a metaphorical parallel to forgive/iniquity.¹⁹ This is the conclusion of VanGemeren who states that this is likely a metaphor for “adversities or setbacks” and healing is therefore restoration.²⁰

Personally I am persuaded that there is equally good reason to see the parallel as one of range from the soul to the natural person – a range of works demonstrated by Jesus during his incarnate ministry.

We also see that there is reference to deliverance from tragedy, danger, and hardship - redeeming from the pit (often a metaphor for redeeming from troubled times and circumstances – possibly even death).

The fourth elements are that The LORD crowns his own with steadfast love or his covenant love and with mercy. Again, magnificent elements that are means in and of themselves for worship, but coupled into a breadth of reasons for the soul to erupt in blessing The LORD.

Steadfast love or covenant love would certainly be a major element of an Israelite's life/experience – they are the Covenant people of God. The only people group in the world to have The LORD of glory enter into an unbreakable covenant relationship with them and a relationship of love. Here it is expressed that they are crowned or covered in the steadfast love of The LORD.

Just a thematic side note: In 103:4 we see the first of four references to the steadfast love of God (103:4, 103:8, 103:11, and 103:17).

Mercy the compassionate restriction of the fullness of what is deserved in discipline or punitive action. David was very familiar and found solace in the mercy of God, as was demonstrated in his choice when being severely disciplined by God in 1 Chronicles 21 and required to choose his punishment: three years of famine, three months of fleeing from his enemy, or three days of "the sword of the LORD, pestilence on the land..." 1 Chronicles 21:12 His response, "I am in great distress. Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for his *mercy* is very great...." 1 Chronicles 21:13

¹⁸ This is not intended to fully address the scope of what the Old Testament believer would have understood or known about the final atoning work of Christ, but to demand we recognize that justification is worked in the heart of the one who demonstrates genuine faith in the revealed truths of God. This faith would have demonstrated itself through the faithful adherence to the requirements of the Law.

¹⁹ ESV SB, Pg.1068

²⁰ VanGemeren, Pg.757

David knew the precious value of casting himself on the compassionate restriction of God and here he testifies that the beloved are crowned or covered in both the covenant love and this precious mercy.

Also note that steadfast love and mercy are frequently paired together when addressing the character of God, particularly in a redemptive context. However, it would appear that in the majority of those contexts these are distinguished elements, not unlike another frequent element in this coupling: slow to anger. The one possible overt exception is another Psalm of David, Psalm 51:1, where he states in a context of repentance and restoration, "Have *mercy* on me, O God, **according to your steadfast love.**" Mercy here appearing to be a beneficiary element coming from steadfast love.

David states that The LORD satisfies his own with good so *that* their youth is renewed like eagles. There appears to be some sort of reinvigoration that the beloved enjoys. The image that he uses is an eagle - an image of strength and resilience. Youth being a time of strength and vigor... and the image is of the powerful bird, an eagle.

They are full, satisfied, and enjoying enough good from The LORD.

Note that the KJV and NKJV include the word "your/thy mouth" making it explicitly a natural provision of food whereas the ESV, NASB, and NET are not as precise and do not include "mouth" but include language such as years and life instead.

Finally, regarding this element, VanGemeren argues, primarily from restoration passages in Jeremiah that this is satisfying the covenant people with the blessings of the covenant. He does also reference Psalm 23:6,²¹ but while consistent with other elements present in Redemptive History I am not wholly persuaded that this makes for a good conclusion here. At best it simply is not quite clear enough for me to draw this conclusion. Therefore, I personally will leave this at The LORD effectually and restoratively satisfying his people.

103:6-9 Testimony to the character of the God worthy of blessing.

103:6-7 The historic demonstration of The LORD's righteousness and justice.

The LORD works righteousness, or that which is perfectly right before him, and justice, or the maintaining of the right rule or right judgment. These things are worked for the oppressed, or those for whom matters have been made more weighty and burdensome than they merit.

In what ways has he made his ways known to Moses:

Moses was consistently in the presence of The LORD (on the mountain and in the tent of meeting).

Moses had an intimate relationship with The LORD - face to face speaking to him, even contending with him and with wisdom as he petitioned The LORD based on his own great character.

In what ways has he made his acts known to the people of Israel:

Israel would certainly have been known/understood to have been the people to whom he is referencing all along, so an overt reference by name coupled with Moses would appear to perhaps be an intentional tie in with the Exodus and Conquest generation.

Israel would have known the experience of crying out to God, of watching his unparalleled demonstrations of glory and awesomeness in their victorious keeping and deliverance, their being kept in the wilderness, the judgment against the grumblers and unbelievers, and then the miraculous conquest of the Promised Land

As the text is clearly making overt references to Exodus 33-34 I have provided a sampling of The LORD making his ways known to Moses and his acts to Israel from these chapters.

Exodus 33:7-11 "Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And **everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting**, which was outside the camp.

²¹ VanGemeren, Pg.757

Whenever **Moses went out to the tent**, all the people would rise up, and **each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses** until he had gone into the tent. **When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.** And **when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship**, each at his tent door. **Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.** When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent."

Exodus 34:4-7 "So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. **The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed,** 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'"

Exodus 34:10 "And he said, 'Behold, I am making a covenant. **Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.**'"

Note the manner in which The LORD chose to describe himself when his faithful servant requests to see his glory: merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, abounding in faithfulness, keeping steadfast love, forgiving iniquity, and forgiving transgression.

103:8-9 The LORD's gracious disposition toward his own.

David appears to be reciting a consistent pattern of exemplified character qualities revealed by The LORD: he is merciful, he is gracious, he is slow to anger, and he is abounding in steadfast love. As observed above these identically constitute the majority of the qualities proclaimed to Moses when The LORD passed by him and made himself known, when the man who knew him face to face requested to see his glory.

The merciful God 103:8 is merciful 103:4. He restricts what is deserved by means of this debt being satisfied. Note also the coupling of mercy and grace here. These are not synonymous terms, but true partners in a magnificent work, a natural harmony in the relation of God to his fallen people.

Slow to anger, is an extraordinary kindness, because as we know, God is angry with our sin Psalm 90:7-11 and we have an unfortunate appetite for it.... So that it is his character to be slow to anger is a grace that allows for any life to continue and for forgiveness to be secured by some.

Abounding in steadfast love - enjoying an overflowing surplus of steadfast love, love that binds itself in promise, a promise that is made by the promise making/promise keeping God.

These character qualities are referenced throughout the Scriptures and frequently clustered together in various capacities. The following only serve as examples of this pattern.

2 Chronicles 30:9 Hezekiah calls the people to repentance and reminds them in this, "For if you return to The LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For The LORD your God is *gracious and merciful* and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him."

Nehemiah 9:17 In a time of corporate reading of the Scriptures and confession Nehemiah recounted the dealings of The LORD with Israel and referenced Israel's rebelliousness in the wilderness following the Exodus and the response by The LORD as it was rooted in his character, "But you are a God ready to forgive, *gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*, and did not forsake them." Twice more in Psalms David draws on these paramount character qualities of God, once in petition for deliverance and once in worshipful praise.

Psalm 86:14-15	"O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them. But you, O Lord, are a God <i>merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.</i> "
Psalm 145:8-9	"The LORD is <i>gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.</i> The LORD is good to all, and mercy is over all that he has made."
Joel 2:12-13	In Joel we see the people being called to repentance and restoration - also rooted in these character qualities of The LORD. "'Yet even now,' declares The LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to The LORD your God, for he is <i>gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love</i> ; and he relents over disaster."

"God's covenant with and rule over Israel are characterized by grace and divine fidelity. Even when the Great King expresses his righteous anger at Israel's sin, he upholds the covenant by his grace."²²

Next we see a small transition of subject/approach to chiding and anger. It appears that on some level that The LORD is presently chiding and angry, but that this will not continue indefinitely.

Chiding: Quarreling, contending, confronting, arguing.

Consider with me, that if there is a legitimate reason to chide and be angry, and for God there certainly would be for him to exercise these elements, then there also has to be a legitimate change of circumstances or of the elements involved to bring them to an end. The LORD's holiness and justice does not just decide to disregard angering offenses – something has to change before this can occur and we ought not just take this change for granted.

What changes is debated. John MacArthur states that this is a reference to final judgment of the disobedient and unbelieving. However, this does not appear to match the contextual flow as immediately preceding this was the revelation of the gracious and merciful character of God and following it the overt references to God dealing with the sins of the beloved. Nevertheless, I concede that this certainly could be accurate and I am confident of MacArthur's ability to note the surrounding context. However, perhaps another option, and one that may be in harmony with the other, is that this time of chiding and anger will cease with the ushering in of the righteous kingdom of God, when the old passes away and there is no need for such chiding or anger.

103:10-14 God's gracious and salvific restorative disposition toward men who fear him.

103:10-12 The LORD's salvation for those who fear him.

103:10 should immediately provoke a question that in turn demands a resolution: What does David mean that The LORD does not deal with us according to our sins? How could he not repay us according to our iniquities?

The resolution is found in the following two verses, 103:11-12. Note though that the resolution is packed with volumes of details not immediately expressed, such as - the *not* repaying according to one's iniquities has to be because one's iniquities have been paid for by another means.

There was an overlooking of offense or the offense has been satisfied. However, it was not inherently paid for by the sacrificial system as testified to by David himself in Psalm 51. Yes, the sacrificial system and its elements and procedures were good, but they were not in and of themselves salvific - it has been and will be justification by faith alone.

Further, we see most clearly the context of how he does not repay us according to our iniquities in view of 103:3, they have been forgiven. However, restoration and forgiveness was not a mere overlooking or cancellation of debt, but a debt satisfied through the propitiation of the Son on the cross. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

²² VanGemeren, Pg.759

Again, recognizing that Israel operated and was restored in a context of the sacrificial system, VanGemenen rightly affirms, "The efficacy of the offering did not lie in the offering but in God's [steadfast or covenant] love...."²³ He then goes on to further qualify, "This love anticipated the gift of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ...."²⁴

This is the truth of 103:10 holds up, "For... or because..." The LORD so absolutely deals with our sins on account of his covenant love for his people.

How high are the heavens above the earth? Can that truly be quantified by natural man? It appears to be an image that exceeds what can be measured or a riddle that will never be satisfied. It is effectively infinite.

Further, this magnificent picture yields to be a simile or a picture of just how magnificent or great is The LORD's steadfast love.

Note also that The LORD's magnificent steadfast love is toward a specific people: those who fear him. This is consistent with that steadfast or covenant love - it was not just a *carte blanche* blessing and favor from God. These benefits and joys were rooted in covenant obedience as expressed here by fearing God as those who fear him will walk in faithful obedience demonstrating an effectual faith in their hearts and consequently experiencing blessing as one who is justified before God.

This really qualifies the prior references to steadfast love too as observed in 103:4 and 103:8. There is a precise "you" that these wonderful promises are being applied to and not the universal man.

David continues on from "so great" to "so far."

The next image is of a meeting that will never occur as by their nature the elements are advancing in opposite directions and to meet would undo what they are and therefore nullify their true meeting. This is not a dog chasing his tail with the possibility of the mouth finally finding victory - that is all too possible. This is a meeting that *will not* happen just as our transgressions *will never* find the justified guilty again.

This is the only means by which one can be made right with God, the only way one can be justified, if the offense is removed and never finds its residency among us again. It has to be absolute to be effectual. It also has to be an act of God to be possible. It is both.

By what means does he remove our transgression from us? It has to be the justification that is employed by faith or it would be a works righteousness. Further this faith makes itself known by its fear of God.

103:13-14 The LORD's compassion for those who fear him.

The "as/so" pattern continues the tie in with 103:12 and 103:13 with the next image drawing on relationship - father and child.

A father shows compassion to his children by a proactive, moved, and affectionate care. In a like manner The LORD shows compassion to not just anyone, but to the one who fears him!

Note that this is one of the three references which are qualified by fearing The LORD in Psalm 103, the other two times are directly tied to the steadfast love of The LORD, therefore I am persuaded that it is reasonable to conclude that compassion is a kind manifestation of the steadfast love of The LORD.

The compassion here is expressed as a preeminent character quality that God chose to express to Moses and it is articulated *in preparation for the moment* that he will pass before Moses and declare the aforementioned qualities of merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding steadfast love. "And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before

²³ VanGemenen, Pg.761

²⁴ VanGemenen, Pg.761

you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show *mercy/compassion* on whom I will show *mercy/compassion*.'" Exodus 33:19

Compassion being an articulation of mercy, a gentle disposition to one in a less or compromised context.

Tied into The LORD's fatherly compassion is an awareness of the temporal frailty of man: we are but dust. The LORD understands man for what he is... that he is from dust and to dust he will return after a temporal life on earth.

Understanding this he has compassion like a father with his child.

The compassion of God is rather remarkable... we can observe it with the conclusion of Jonah where the prophet expresses his understanding of the character of God "...I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." Jonah 4:2 This framed in the context of Jonah being angry that God spared repentant Nineveh at this time and that because he knew God's character he knew this would happen. God's character as articulated in the character qualities that Moses had proclaimed to him and that David affirms in this psalm. The character qualities that provoked him to having pity on Nineveh which was occupied by an abundance of people ignorant of truth.

This same God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... recognizes that man is but dust and he chooses to have compassion on those who would fear him.

103:15-19 Temporal man who fears God enjoys the magnificent blessings of the eternal and heavenly King.

103:15-18 The temporal nature of man in contrast to the eternal love of God on those who fear him.

David goes on to speak of the temporal nature of man, like grass, like the flower of the field, so very temporal in their time. A short season of flourishing and then forgotten.

Very similar to the language of Moses in Psalm 90 when speaking to the same subject and the experience of one is from dust and to dust.

Now in direct contrast to the temporal nature of man is the steadfast or promise keeping love of The LORD that is from forever and to forever, it is eternal - never to flourish and fade, but majestically enduring from and to forever. However, again, this is not an unqualified element or blessing. This is the third use of the fear of The LORD and it again serves to qualify who enjoys this steadfast love, it is those who fear him.

There is another enduring element present - The LORD's righteousness that continues for generations, on children's children, but this too is qualified. It is not simply that one is a beneficiary of the righteousness of God by birthright (even in Israel), but this is qualified by covenant obedience. This is a blessing experienced by those who keep The LORD's covenant and remember to do his commandments. It is for those walking in covenant obedience, true and believing Israel.

Whereas The LORD will not keep his anger *forever* (103:9), his steadfast love is from forever to forever on those who love him, on those who keep, maintain, perform, his covenant, on those who remember to execute the precepts of God as articulated in the Scriptures.

103:19 The LORD is sovereign ruler over all.

David, the king, is affirming his greater King from whom he derives the rights and privileges of ruling himself as he serves as the greater King's temporal steward. Again, David directly or indirectly appears to be affirming what the psalmist states in Psalm 2, that The LORD sits as the King of Kings in the heavens where he conducts his sovereign purposes and from where he sets aside and establishes his Son as the King to whom all others must pay homage and submit. King David understood this greater King. He knew that The LORD has established his throne in the heavens.

The LORD on his throne in heaven:

The LORD's throne is established in the heavens, that place that in 103:11 was used as a reference for an exalted and unreachable place, this is where The LORD rules over all.

1 Kings 22:19 Micaiah prophesied about seeing The LORD sitting on his throne in the heavens.

Psalms 11:4 David testified again that The LORD's throne is in heaven.

Matthew 23:22 Jesus stated that one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and him who sits upon it.

Revelation 4:2 John saw a throne in heaven and the Lord seated upon it.

"This universal kingdom is to be distinguished from God's mediatorial kingdom on earth."²⁵

103:20-22 A finale of exhortations for the supernatural and natural works of God to join David in blessing The LORD!

103:20-21 Exhortation for the angels to join in blessing The LORD!

Having called his own soul to blessing The LORD in the first verses and then making a most compelling case for the merit and even necessity to bless The LORD, David now returns to the charge again. He first applies this exhortation to the mighty messengers of God who carry out his works in ways most frequently unknown by men, but in untarnished obedience to God.

Again he charges the angels who are described as mighty ones, obedient, the hosts of The LORD and his ministers to fulfill one of their greatest calls – to bless The LORD. He is exhorting the angels to declare the excellencies of God in their action and in their proclamation.

103:22 All creation is called upon to bless The LORD!

David then exhorts all of the works of God, which would include all of creation: natural and supernatural to bless The LORD.

He appears to qualify each of the groups in 103:20-22 with their second half being more precise or contributing to sharpen the first half in some way:

103:20 Angels - mighty ones; doing – obeying.

103:21 Hosts – ministers.

103:22 All his works - in all places of his dominion.

There is no place that The LORD's dominion is lacking or is absent. He rules from heaven, but he rules all as David also articulated in Psalm 139:8-12. "If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."

103:22 David again calling on himself to bless The LORD.

Finally David concludes with a final charge to himself, the same with which he began the psalm, "Bless The LORD, O my soul!"

Angels, Ministers, Creation, bless The LORD! Bless The LORD, O my soul!

²⁵ MacArthur, Pg.833