



Psalm 65 - Thanksgiving for Earth's Bounty

To the leader. A Psalm of David. A Song.

Introduction

This is a thanksgiving; the specific occasion is a fruitful harvest (vv.9-13). Perhaps this good harvest has come after a drought, which was seen as a sign of divine displeasure (v.3 and vv.9-10); this is confirmed by: <<***The sky over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land into powder, and only dust shall come down upon you from the sky until you are destroyed***>> (Deuteronomy 28:23-24).

Or perhaps the psalm is celebrating the Festival of Weeks, i.e. Pentecost. The harvest is set in the context of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises (vv.1-8). The Sinai covenant ties together God's grace, the believing response of the people, and the fruitfulness of the land. Singing this song should develop a deep spirit of gratitude in the hearts of the worshippers.

Psalm 65:1-4 - Praise for God in Zion

Zion is the name of the city that David captured and made his capital (2 Samuel 5:7), and which became the site of the tabernacle, and later of the temple. These verses describe acts of public worship at the central sanctuary: praise, vows, prayer, shall all flesh come, atone, courts, house, and temple. The passage celebrates the unlimited kindness and mercy of God to his people: God atones for his people's transgressions through the sacrifices, which is what allows them to draw near in worship, to dwell in his courts; refer to the comment made on Psalm 23:5-6. The holiness of God's temple is to such people a matter of delight, and not of terror.

- ¹ Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;

and to you shall vows be performed,
2 O you who answer prayer!
To you all flesh shall come.
3 When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.

Psalm 65:1-3

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion. The psalmist David described a wonderful picture, the idea that praise was waiting to be given unto God in Jerusalem. The sense is that when God came to meet his people he would be received in an atmosphere of praise.

And to you shall vows be performed. God's people would gather together in Jerusalem to thank God for answering their prayers and to give sacrifices and praise in fulfilment of vows made. Believers should take seriously their vows before God. In addition to vows and promises made to God, Christian baptism is itself a vow to God. A believer's association with God's people is a vow. These should be regarded with a solemn and serious dependence upon God.

At Mount Zion the Son of David fulfilled the greatest vow, coming to completely do the will of God: <<Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart>> (Psalm 40:6-8), and giving his life as a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of the world.

O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come. Praise awaits and vows are performed because God hears and answers prayer. This goodness of God draws not only Israel, but also all flesh. This starts a thought that will be developed later in the psalm.

When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. This shows a proper understanding of the sacrificial system in God's greater plan. David understood his personal struggle against sin, and how he sometimes failed in that struggle. He also understood that God's answer for transgressions is an atoning sacrifice that God provides. David believed in the system of animal sacrifice established by the Law of Moses, but he also looked beyond that system to a perfect sacrifice that God himself would provide. In this David looked to the Messiah and his perfect, atoning work on the Cross: <<**they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed**>> (Romans 3:24-25), and:

<<how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!>> (Hebrews 9:14).

⁴ Happy are those whom you choose and bring near
to live in your courts.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
your holy temple.

Psalm 65:4

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. In the connection between God and man, David knew that God was the cause of the connection. The connection begins when God chooses and then causes a man or a woman to come to him. God did just this to demonstrate that Aaron had been chosen by him as high priest: *<<Then he said to Korah and all his company, ‘In the morning the Lord will make known who is his, and who is holy, and who will be allowed to approach him; the one whom he will choose he will allow to approach him>> (Numbers 16:5).*

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house. Once established and enjoyed, the connection between God and man brings satisfaction to man. They experienced God’s house as a place of goodness received.

Your holy temple. The Jerusalem temple did not exist during David’s lifetime although it had been his desire to build it. When David talks of the temple he may be referring to the tabernacle, looking forward to when worship would be held in Solomon’s temple, or it may be the temple where God dwells, i.e. heaven.

Psalm 65:5-8 - You Have Shown Us Awesome Deeds

This section recounts some of the awesome deeds God has done for his people; the special focus is the work of creation, which is suited to the occasion: the creator is the one who has blessed the harvest. The point that the OT often makes is that the creator of heaven and earth and of all mankind is the hope of all the ends of the earth, i.e. the one true God whom all mankind should worship as their only hope. The marvel is that this universal creator has chosen a particular people to receive his blessing and care, which itself should bring benefit to the rest of mankind: *<<to you all flesh shall come>> in due course, (v.2).* The prophet foresees this day: *<<By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear’>> (Isaiah 45:23).* Paul also acknowledges this outcome: *<<Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and*

under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.

⁶ By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.

⁷ You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.

⁸ Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

Psalm 65:5-8

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation. This was an ongoing confidence in the continuation of God's goodness. God had answered prayer and provided atonement; David expected such awesome deeds in the future also.

You are the hope of all the ends of the earth. David again lifted his vision from beyond Israel only to the ends of the earth, to the farthest seas. He understood that although Israel belonged to God in a special sense, he was and is the God of the whole earth: <<*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it*>> (Psalm 24:1).

By your strength you established the mountains. Mountains are seen as being among the most formidable of physical objects. God created the method by which they came into being: <<*For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth – the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!*>> (Amos 4:13). Mountains are also used as analogies for insurmountable problems in life, yet he says that simple faith in him can remove them: <<*Jesus answered them, 'Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "Be lifted up and thrown into the sea", it will be done'*>> (Matthew 21:21).

You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. God's might is shown in his ability to quiet not only the oceans but also the noise of the peoples of the world. His authority extended far beyond Israel, to the farthest parts of the earth.

Stormy and noisy seas put forth enormous energy. According to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), an average hurricane releases energy equivalent to 6×10^{14} watts of electricity. This is 200 times the world-wide electrical generating capacity. NASA says that in its lifetime an average hurricane can release as much energy as 10,000 nuclear bombs. Yet God can and does still the noise of the seas and the noise of their waves.

Knowing this great power of God should build faith when Christians see the tumult of the peoples and are concerned for God's salvation to reach the ends of the earth. They can think of those at the ends of the earth as those who are farthest off, least known, least thought of, most afflicted, and the hardest to reach.

You make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. The exercise of God's authority over the earth does not bring it fear and oppression; it brings rejoicing to the day.

Psalm 65:9-13 - You Have Made the Land Produce Abundantly

This section enables God's people to delight in his bountiful supply for his land by enabling them to imagine what the ground itself would feel under God's blessing: the abundance of water in an arid land, softening it with showers so that the farmers can work it and the plants can grow; the fields clothing themselves with grass, grazing animals, and grain; and the overflowing wagon tracks. These images convey the thought of a land producing abundantly for man and beast. In the personification, the very pastures, hills, meadows, and valleys shout and sing together for joy. The faithful people can see their song as joining the celebration of the fruitful land.

- ⁹ You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
- ¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,

and blessing its growth.

11 You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Psalm 65:9-13

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it. God cares for the earth and makes sure it has what it needs. He provides rivers of water, and grain for the earth. The idea is clear: the earth is barren until God acts upon it. God is faithful to send the rain and what is necessary for the cultivation of the earth, bringing forth a wonderful harvest: *<<yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy>>* (Acts 14:17). So God's people should pray and expect God to move upon both the Church and the world, knowing that they will be barren unless God acts upon them. The prophet speaks of this analogy between the fruitfulness of the earth and the effectiveness of God's work, especially through his Word: *<<For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it>>* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Blessing its growth. The earth is full of living, growing things, all established and blessed by God. This is another aspect of his power and care for the earth.

You crown the year with your bounty. A full and plentiful harvest is the crown of the year; and this springs from the unmerited goodness of God. This is the diadem of the earth.

The meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain. David looked out over the land and saw hills covered with livestock and valleys full of grain. It seemed that creation itself shouted for joy and sang to God. The hills and valleys are happy and joyful before God because of his great power and care for them. David understood that the people of God have those same reasons to praise God, in addition to the even greater reasons of atonement and connection with God described earlier in psalm.