



Psalm 67 - The Nations Called to Praise God

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.

Introduction

This psalm, like Psalm 65, seems to be a thanksgiving for a fruitful harvest. Unlike Psalm 65, it is not really a thanksgiving hymn; it is rather a prayer that God will bless his people Israel so that the rest of the world may come to know the true God. Verses 3 and 5 of Psalm 67 are the same, marking the ends of their stanzas; they summarise the desire of this psalm: <<**Let all the peoples praise you!**>> Singing this helps Israel to keep its own calling in view: their blessing is not simply for themselves but for the Gentiles too. Each Israelite is a player in a grand story that stretches far beyond the boundaries of his own life, or even of his own land.

This psalm has a heart to see God's way, God's salvation, and God's praise extended all through the earth.

Psalm 67:1-3 - May God Bless Us, So that All Nations May Know Him

Verse 1 adapts the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26: may God be gracious, bless, and make his face to shine, and v.2 follows it with a purpose clause: the goal for which the congregation prays for God's blessing is that God's way may be known on earth; specifically, that his saving power might be known among all nations. God called Abram both to bless him and his descendants and to make them a vehicle of blessing to the Gentiles (Genesis 12:2-3). These words turn that calling into a song.

- ¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

Psalm 67:1

May God be gracious to us and bless us. As previously mentioned, the words come from the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, where the high priest of Israel would pronounce this beautiful blessing upon the people.

May God be gracious to us. The psalmist first knew his need for mercy. This sets the heart in the right frame of mind; sinners who need the mercy of God. One may need more mercy than another, but everyone needs mercy.

And bless us. Beyond the mercy of God, which he could show simply by leaving people alone, by not destroying them, they want God to bless us also. One can imagine a guilty criminal before a judge, pleading for mercy, and receiving it, and then asking for a blessing! But God's love towards all people is that great and more besides.

And make his face to shine upon us. To have the glorious, happy face of God shining upon man is the greatest gift one could have. To know that as God looks upon a Christian, he is well pleased, not because of who they are, or what they have done, but because they are in Jesus Christ, there is no greater source of peace and power in life.

Selah, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect.

² that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.

Psalm 67:2

That your way may be known upon earth. The reason the psalmist asks for this high and great blessing is not a selfish reason. He asks for this blessing for the sake of God's glory, and for the sake of the perishing multitudes.

Your way. Not simply the truth of God, or the Word of God to be published abroad, but for his way, the way of the Lord, to be known on earth. This is a reminder of the idea behind the great missionary passage of Matthew 28:19-20: **<<Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age>>**. Jesus did not tell them only to evangelise and save souls, but to make disciples of all the nations, and to teach them to observe all things that he has commanded of his followers. Of course, Christians need to know God's Word to walk in his way; but walking in his way is more than knowing his Word!

May be known upon earth. The psalmist has a beautiful scope in mind. Not just Jerusalem, not just Judæa, not just all of Israel, not just all the Middle East, not just all the Mediterranean world, not just his continent or hemisphere, but all the earth! God wants his people to have the same heart and the same vision, for all the earth!

Your saving power among all nations. Of all of the ways of God, this is the most precious and needful. Christians should see a perishing world and long for God's salvation among all nations. Again, this is the reason for blessing. A person should ask "Am I a member of the 'bless me' club?" Always crying out to God, "Bless me, bless me, bless me!" But that cry is essentially a selfish one, the kind of cry a self-interested child makes. Yes, people unashamedly ask God to bless them, but not only for themselves, but so his way will be made known on all the earth, and his salvation among all nations!

Scripture makes it clear that God offers salvation to all, although this should never be seen as universalism. People will know of God's salvation but they will not all be saved: <<*The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations*>> (Psalm 98:2), <<*The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give*>> (Isaiah 62:2), <<*Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him*>> (Acts 10:34-35), and: <<*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly*>> (Titus 2:11-12).

³ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Psalm 67:3

Let the peoples praise you, O God. This is first and foremost a prayer to God. It is fine to call upon the peoples to praise God; but it is also fine to ask God to bring the nations to himself. When people pray like this, they pray according to the heart of God, who desires that none perish but all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), and who has ordained a great multitude from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues to praise him before his throne (Revelation 7:9).

If it was not big enough to pray **let the peoples praise you**, the psalmist takes it a step deeper: **Let all the peoples praise you!** Christians do not only want the earth to know God's way; they do not even want it to stop with the nations knowing his salvation. They want the all the peoples to praise him! There is something wonderful about a lot of people praising God, and a person's walk with God is

incomplete until they are praising him. Does the church have the same heart? Or will they write off some peoples, instead of having God's heart for all the peoples?

Psalm 67:4-5 - May All Nations Be Glad in His Rule

In addition to their knowing God's saving power, the psalmist prays that the nations be glad and sing for joy because he rules over them with equity. This could be a prayer that these Gentiles come to appreciate the author of that general and kind providence they have experienced, and then to worship him; but, since the term judge seems to indicate a more direct rule than simply oversight it is more likely that this is praying for the day when God's acknowledged rule is extended to include the Gentiles.

In the OT, the first duty of the judge was to protect the innocent; he was a kind of saviour. The OT very decidedly looks to a future era in which the Gentiles receive God's light, and this song fosters this hope in each ordinary believer. The Christian message includes the announcement that this era has arrived, due to Jesus' resurrection, which installs him on the throne of David (Romans 1:1-5).

⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Psalm 67:4-5

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. Why? Why should the nations be so happy? Because God is coming to judge the people righteously, to govern and guide the nations on earth. Jesus is coming back, and it should make Christians even more excited about bringing the nations God's way, God's salvation, and God's praise. God forbid that knowing that Jesus is coming soon should make them less passionate about evangelism and missions. Surely, it should make them more passionate!

Guide the nations on earth. It is a fact. It is going to happen. Jesus Christ is going to reign on planet earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. The church should want to get the nations ready for it!

Selah here is worthy of reflection, the connection between being passionate about the return of Jesus and a passion to spread the Gospel.

Verse 5 is a repeat of v.3.

Psalm 67:6-7 - God Will Bless Us, So that All Nations May Fear Him

The final stanza repeats the idea of blessing from the first, and indicates one particular kind of blessing for which the people should give thanks: the earth has yielded its increase. To fear God means to hold him and his word in reverence, a disposition of true faith.

^{6a} The earth has yielded its increase;

Psalm 67:6a

The earth has yielded its increase. When the earth knows God's way, God's salvation, and God's praise, then it will yield its increase: <<*The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them*>> (Ezekiel 34:27), and: <<*For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things*>> (Zechariah 8:12). The fruit will come forth; the appointed purpose for the earth will be fulfilled. Praise God! This also reveals that the earth will never yield its increase, find its fruitfulness and fulfilment, until it knows God's way, God's salvation, and God's praise.

^{6b} God, our God, has blessed us.

^{7a} May God continue to bless us;

Psalm 67:6b-7a

God, our God, has blessed us. When Christians share God's heart and vision for the world, they will be blessed. They must be blessed. So they see a glorious circle. They are blessed; they use that blessing to pray for and reach a hurting world, and as that aligns them with the heart of God, they are blessed even more, so they use that blessing for all the earth, and it just goes on and on. It is worth them looking at their lives and seeing if they have broken the circle anywhere. They should ask, "Have we stopped believing that God blesses? Have we stopped seeking to extend that blessing? Have we stopped seeing God's heart in it all?" If they do not break the circle, they really move from glory to glory! It is repeated twice, in a row, to emphasise the confident expectation.

^{7b} let all the ends of the earth revere him.

Psalm 67:7b

Let all the ends of the earth revere him. God gets the respect, the honour, the praise, the glory, he is worthy of. Christians may never get respect; they may

never face anything but hardship; they may end up poor and broken and persecuted and even laying down their lives, and be more blessed than ever, because God has used them in a great way: <<***Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen***>> (Jude 24-25).