

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Psalms		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	20		Mason Depew
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A CITY ON A HILL

Introduction: Psalm 67 includes, in a more succinct form, all the main themes of Psalm 65. Most notably, the psalmist sings about God's saving grace in the first two verses, common grace in verses 4 and 6, and draws a connection between the two just as David did in Psalm 65. There are also several parallels between both these psalms and the one in between them, Psalm 66. I will point out a few of these connections in the footnotes as we go verse-by-verse.

1. The Nations Witness Israel's Blessings - 67:1-2
 - a. The first verse of this psalm makes a very clear reference to Aaron's famous priestly blessing.¹ These words were so famous that any devout Jew would immediately know what the psalmist is alluding to here.
 - i. Aaron's blessing is about as broad as can be. It does not refer to any specific gifts from God, but rather to being generally in his favor, from which all good things can be expected to come. Think of it like coming into the presence of a powerful and just king: if he makes eye contact and smiles at you ("lifts up his countenance upon you") then you would know you are on good footing with him and everything will be alright.
 - ii. Notice that Aaron's blessing uses the personal name, YHWH, whereas Psalm 67 uses the more generic word *elohim*, which can refer to God or the gods of the nations. Here it definitely does refer to the one true God, but using this word consistently throughout the psalm reinforces that it is aimed at all nations, not just Israel.
 - iii. It is interesting that Psalm 67 leaves out any reference to the last line of the blessing, concerning peace. This is perhaps because the following verses exhort the gentiles to praise the God of Israel, which would remind all Jews singing this that they are not truly at peace with the nations. The psalmist would then be implying that God's people can only have peace with the world when all peoples embrace the worship of the one true God.²
 - b. Verse 2 predicts that the result of God blessing his people will be that all other peoples take notice. At this point, interpreters often ask: what specific event or period of Israel's

¹ "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 'The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.'" So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." - Numbers 6:22-27

² This also builds anticipation for Psalm 68, which describes the nations coming to worship God in more vivid detail: "Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you. Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples who delight in war. Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God. O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, Selah." - Psalm 68:29-32

history is this psalm talking about? Is this about the “saving power” God showed during the Exodus? The era of the Judges? The Monarchy? The Exile? There is some evidence for both the first and the last of these epochs.

- i. The nations noticing God’s salvation for his people certainly is an accurate description of the Exodus. The nations surrounding Egypt and Canaan did indeed hear of the great disasters inflicted on the Hebrews’ enslavers.³ In this case, however, the nations were terrified of God and did not rejoice to see his power unfold.⁴
- ii. The reference to “among all nations” in verse 2 could suggest the Jews will be blessed in the midst of all nations so that they will behold God’s salvation and praise him. This would make perfect sense if the psalm was written during the Babylonian Exile. The psalmist’s request, then, is specifically that God will prosper them in Babylon and everywhere else they have been dispersed to, so that their pagan neighbors will stop their mockery and see that God is actually still with them as he promised them, even in the Exile. This request likely has the return from Exile ultimately in view, too.⁵
- iii. Regardless of which time the psalmist lived in, he almost certainly had God’s promises to Abraham in mind here. God had famously declared that in Abraham, *all* the families of the earth would eventually be blessed.⁶ In the context of Genesis, where all the families of the earth have slowly unfolded from Adam while living all the time under the curse of his Fall, this is certainly one of the clearest glimmers of Gospel hope in a very dark world. This also explains why the nations will have reason to rejoice rather than tremble at Israel’s salvation: all nations will ultimately share in this salvation.
- iv. It seems most likely to me that Psalm 67 was written during the Exile, but also that the psalmist is avoiding specifics. This has the effect of drawing our attention to this thread running throughout not just one event or period, but *all* of Israel’s history. The psalmist wants us to look beyond any particular moment when God saved his people in the past to the glorious truth that he *still saves and will save*. Each instance showing God’s saving power in the history of redemption is a link in the one grand chain that will culminate in the end of history.⁷

³ Notice that this is much more clearly the focus of the previous psalm: “Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in him,” - Psalm 66:5-6

⁴ Moses makes a note of this multiple times, but none more dramatically than in the song of the sea: “The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased.” - Exodus 15:14-16

⁵ The psalmist may be thinking of the Lord’s promises in Jeremiah 29:11-14, which reads, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”

⁶ “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁷ This helps explain why typology is a legitimate (and, in fact, biblically necessary) method for interpreting Scripture. The particular moments when God has acted to save his people are important to understand, literally and in their historical contexts, but they also have significance beyond their own times. The Bible does not record events haphazardly, as if Moses is just telling us what he could figure out or what we might be curious to know. Every moment in which God delivered his people from their enemies was all building up to the climactic revelation of their anointed Savior: “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” - Luke 24:25-27

2. Let the Nations Worship Israel's God - 67:3-5

a. These verses exhort the gentiles to praise Israel's God.

- i. The first reason for this is implied, based on the context of the previous two verses: God has blessed Israel in wonderful, glorious ways. As already mentioned, the idea that the nations would praise God and rejoice over Israel's salvation hints more at the return from Exile under Cyrus being the background of this psalm rather than the Exodus.
- ii. The second reason is given in verse 4, the middle of the psalm: God judges all the nations of the earth fairly and even guides them. The God of Israel is not merely a local deity like so many pagan gods were believed to be; he has a special relationship with his people Israel, but that doesn't mean he rules and shows some measure of grace to them alone.
 1. As we saw from studying Psalm 65, this is the difference between God's saving grace and his common grace. Saving grace redeems, heals, and ultimately consummates God's chosen ones, whereas common grace preserves and restrains the whole creation.⁸
 2. The codification of this common grace is in the covenant of Noah, which promises to both preserve the world from total destruction and prevent the kind of anarchic evil seen before the Flood.⁹

3. Common Grace Foreshadows Saving Grace - 67:6-7

- a. Just as in Psalm 65, we see here that God's everyday, regular provision for all of humanity provides us with regular, tangible reminders of his saving grace.
 - i. In Israel, these were intimately related because agricultural prosperity was tied to the Covenant of Moses.¹⁰ The fact that the context ties in all the nations of the earth suggests there is more in view here than just Israel's prosperity, though. "Earth" in verses 4 and 7 clearly refers to the whole globe, so it is unlikely that it only means the land of Israel in verse 6.
 - ii. Recall the vivid imagery of Psalm 65; how David described God blessing the fields with generous rain, then requiring innumerable wagons to carry all the produce. These are the kinds of images we should have when we hear, "The earth has yielded its increase."
- b. In a different, more war-like psalm, the final line here would refer to terror at God's unstoppable judgment. In the context of Psalm 67, however, it seems far more plausible to think of this fear as the kind of reverent awe we frequently see believers display when they are confronted with God's overwhelming majesty.

⁸ Notice the parallel with Psalm 66:7, "who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let not the rebellious exalt themselves." God does humble nations that become too arrogant in their rebellion.

⁹ This he does with the institution of the law of retribution, culminating in capital punishment: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." - Genesis 9:6

¹⁰ For example, Deuteronomy 28:8 says, "The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

4. Conclusion

- a. In the Old Testament, God's people were generally not supposed to send out missionaries and proselytize foreign nations. God commanded Israel to be hospitable to foreign sojourners, but he never told them to try and convert Tyre or Egypt, for example.
 - i. Even in the Exile, the Jews brought the Scriptures with them and passively attracted some God-fearing gentiles who would hang around their synagogues and listen, but they did not seek to impose the Mosaic Law on Babylon, Persia, or Rome. God's promises to Abraham saw a limited fulfillment in these times, but the greater fulfillment came with Christ.¹¹
 - ii. This kind of pattern is very common in Scripture. To put it in filmmaking terms, one "set-up" can have multiple "pay-offs" that escalate until Christ brings the climactic fulfillment. For one of the clearest examples of this, consider how Paul does not call Jesus the "second Adam" but the "last Adam," suggesting there were others between the first and the last.¹² Who were they? Mediator figures who brought blessings or cursings upon their posterity (though in a more limited way than either Adam or Christ), such as Noah and Abraham. Their roles in redemptive history certainly echo Adam's role, but only Jesus can truly bring the blessing of everlasting life as the solution to the everlasting death brought on us by Adam. Noah and Abraham did relatively well in following God, but we still see instances of sin that bring about serious problems for their descendants.
 - iii. Similarly, gentiles such as Rahab and Ruth during the time of the Judges, as well as God-fearers during and after the Exile, would no doubt have encouraged the Old Testament people of God. These were clear signs that God had not forgotten his promise to bless all nations through Abraham's offspring, but they did not go far enough by themselves.
- b. It was in the New Testament, only once the Son of David was on the verge of ascending to his heavenly throne in triumph, that he sent out his heralds to proclaim the arrival of his kingdom.¹³
 - i. Recently there have been some who claim that the wording of the Great Commission, referring to "all nations," means that Christians ought to try and convert all the governments of the world into theocracies. This is reading a very modern definition of the word "nation" as "nation-state" back into the Bible. In the Bible, "nation" comes from the Greek word *ethnos* and it refers to something closer to an ethnic group. You can see this, not just from the etymology, but from the way that "nation" and "people" often appear interchangeable.¹⁴

¹¹ Notice how Paul delineates the time of his mission from before, as "times of ignorance" for the Greeks in Acts 17:30. Remember that the Greeks had already had the Old Testament in their language for centuries! So the turning point is not even the translation of the Septuagint: it is Christ's Ascension, together with Pentecost that really opens the doors of the kingdom wide for gentiles.

¹² "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being';[fn] the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.'" - 1 Corinthians 15:45

¹³ "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" - Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁴ For example, John 11:50; Acts 4:25, 8:9, 9:15, 11:1, Galatians 2:12, and many others.

- ii. As John's Revelation makes clear, it is the people whom Christ redeemed that make up the sum and substance of this glorious kingdom, taken from every tribe, tongue, and nation.¹⁵ This is the ultimate answer to Israel's centuries-long desire for peace. There can be no peace while the peoples make war on their Creator, so they must be united in one body of Christ.¹⁶ There is no alternative.
- c. This brings us, at last, to the New Jerusalem, where those believers who reign with Christ from every nation will bring their joyful worship to his feet. John goes out of his way to note that the gates of this city will never be shut, because there will be no more marching enemy armies; only pilgrims come to worship.¹⁷

¹⁵ "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'" - Revelation 5:9-10

¹⁶ Paul expresses this so clearly: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." - Ephesians 2:13-16

¹⁷ "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations." - Revelation 21:22-26.