

God is a form of praise. He notes that the Hebrew texts have no verb that means only "to thank." The verb *תודה*, commonly translated "to thank," is not used to express thanks among human beings (*Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 26-27), and the Hebrew *hodaya* is a way of praising God. Westermann probably pushes the form-critical application of this idea too far (denying the validity of a thanksgiving genre, but dividing praise into two kinds: descriptive—hymnic in older terminology—and declarative, which sets forth how God has acted), but he is surely correct to stress the grounding of thanksgiving in praise of God. The juxtaposition of communal praise in vv 1-12 and individual thanksgiving in vv 13-20 holds the two types of praise together.

On the other hand, praise without thanksgiving moves toward a sterile religious experience in which the praise becomes purely ritualistic. Why should anyone sing the praise of God when there is nothing for which to be thankful? Descriptive praise of God tends to distance his presence from human affairs, which may be desirable, of course, when done in appropriate measure. However, praise continued indefinitely makes God into a fully celestial being and transfers the realm of real meaning and action to the heavenly sphere, or else renders divine action essentially moral. Praise alone would bring static quality to the religious experience. H. H. Guthrie, Jr. (*Theology in Thanksgiving* [New York: Seabury Press, 1981]) has stressed the theological aspects of the mixing of hymnic and thanksgiving materials in the OT. Yahweh, the cosmic sovereign worthy of all praise, made himself known to Israel as the one who used his cosmic power to save the Israelites (v 6) and to lead them through terrible ordeals of fire and water into abundance and freedom (v 12). He is the one who sustains his people among the living and gives them stability in a world of many dangers and pitfalls (v 9). Guthrie notes that the *toda* (thanksgiving) was an appropriate way of giving praise to Yahweh:

Israelites might begin to sing *toda* to Yahweh, but as the singing proceeded quite unconsciously lapse into modes of expression rooted in the hymn. On the other hand, Israelites might set out to hail Yahweh as the ruler of the cosmos using the hymn form appropriate to doing that, but given the character and *modus operandi* of Yahweh, quite unconsciously lapse into words and phrases and forms associated with thanksgivings (23).

As Guthrie argues, this was the mix out of which Israel developed her theology (25). The personal, saving God of real-life experience is also the cosmic, order-bringing God, and all the earth may be summoned to praise him gloriously. Praise and thanksgiving have a symbiotic relationship in Yahwistic theology; one cannot live without the other.

W. O. E. Oesterley (316) says that Ps 66 teaches us the duty of the rendering to God of suitable responses to his many acts of love and deliverance. He suggests that some words from the Book of Common Prayer are appropriate:

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

In Christian tradition, the title in both the LXX and the Vulgate relates this psalm to the Resurrection, probably because of the exodus motif in v 6, the setting of the soul in life in v 9, and the stimulus of v 12 to recall the work of Jesus for Christian readers. The references to "all the earth" in vv 1 and 4 led to the association of the psalm with the Feast of Epiphany, in which it is recalled that foreigners came to worship the newborn king (Matt 2:1-12).

A Prayer for Blessing and Summons to Praise (67:1-8)

Bibliography

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Translation

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|-------|---|---------|
| 1 | For the leader; ^a with instrumental music; ^b a psalm; a song. ^c | |
| 2 (1) | May God ^a be gracious to us and bless us;
may he make his face to shine among ^b us. SELAH. | (3+3) |
| 3 (2) | Knowing ^a your way(s) ^b on the earth,
your saving-work among all the nations, | (3+3) |
| 4 (3) | let the peoples ^a praise you, ^b O God;
let all the peoples praise you. | (3+3) |
| 5 (4) | Let the peoples rejoice and sing ^a for joy,
for you judge people with equity, ^b
and guide people on the earth. SELAH. | (3+3+3) |
| 6 (5) | Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you. | (3+3) |
| 7 (6) | The earth yields ^a its harvest! ^b
Continue to bless us, ^c O God, ^d our God. | (3+3) |
| 8 (7) | May God bless us—
And all the ends of the earth
will fear him! | (2+2+2) |

Notes

- 1.a. See n. 51:1.a.
- 1.b. See n. 54:1.b.
- 1.c. See n. 65:1.c. LXX has "psalm to/for David"; omitting *לשיר*, "song."
- 2.a. "Yahweh" is intended; written as "Elohim" rather frequently in Pss 42-83.

2.b. Num 6:25 has פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ , "his face toward/upon you," rather than אִתְּךָ , "with you."

3.a. Reading the infinitive construct לְדַעַת as circumstantial (GKC, 114o); "then" is understood: "then knowing your ways . . ."; Dahood correctly links v 3 with v 4, translating "if your dominion (way) is known . . . The peoples will praise you, O God." I do not follow Dahood in reading future tense in vv 4-6, because the form of this section seems to be hymnic in nature rather than that of statements of confidence.

3.b. It should be noted that the singular "way" is read as plural in a few mss and may be collective. Two mss read "your way" as "his way" (see *BHS*) and the Syriac has "his ways," with 3rd singular suffix on "saving-work." A change to 3rd person is almost necessary if v 3 is read with v 2 (as in *KJV*, *RSV*, and several translations). However, the change appears to be an easing of an originally more difficult text. It is probable that this is one of the places where דָּרַךְ ("way") means "power/dominion." (cf. Amos 8:14; Prov. 31:3).

4.a. The plural should be retained in the five uses of עַמִּים and the two of לְאֻמִּים . Kidner comments that *KJV*'s "the people" in v 5 seems like little more than "an appeal for hearty singing" (237). Basically the two words seem to have the same meaning (see *BDB*, 522, 766, 468, 710); both words are closely related to גוֹי (v 3b), "nations." For Israel, "people" (עַם) is preferred to "nation" (גוֹי), though the two words are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g., עַם in Isa 1:4; Ezek 36:15; cf. Exod 19:5-6). Gen 25:23 uses לְאֻמָּה as the poetic counterpart of גוֹי . The sense of distinction is clearly set forth in Num 23:9: "Lo, a people [עַם] dwelling apart, not reckoning itself among the nations [גוֹיִם]." The distinction between עַם and גוֹי has much in common with the differentiation in modern English between "people," which emphasizes common cultural and social characteristics, and "nation," which is a more political designation associated with social entities having organized governments. Israel undoubtedly existed as a state under the monarchy, but the predominant terminology was "the people" or the "people of Yahweh" (Judg 5:11, 13; 1 Sam 2:24), and frequently with personal pronouns ("his people," "your people," and "my people") with Yahweh as the subject. Some uses of "people" in the OT designate only a group within Israel, rather than Israel as a whole. For example, in Josh 3:4-6 "the people" (laity) are assigned places and roles different from that of the priests, and the Israelite troops are referred to as "the people" in Josh 8:5, 9-10, 20. Thus it is possible that "peoples" in Ps 67:4-6 refers to a subgroup of Israelites. However, "peoples" can be used of non-Israelites also (note Exod 15:14-15). This fact along with the reference to גוֹיִם in v 3b makes it clear that the reference is to non-Israelite peoples (on the terminology of "people" and "nation," see E. A. Speiser, "People' and 'nation' of Israel," *JBL* 79 [1960] 157-63; N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979], 241-42, 509-12).

4.b. דָּדַע , in *hiphil* imperfect, can be used to express thanksgiving or praise. C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 25-35, argues that there is no word in Hebrew for "to thank"; דָּדַע means "praise." But see Crüsemann, 279-82. Perhaps the meaning should be something like "thankfully praise."

5.a. Reading the imperfects as jussive rather than future; cf. LXX, *KJV*, Buttenwieser, Dahood.

5.b. מִישֵׁר connotes straightness and evenness; thus "equity/fairness/rightly"; used here as an adverbial accusative (Buttenwieser). For a variant LXX reading, see *BHS* (followed by Gunkel and Kraus). V 5 does not require two sets of balanced colons because its tricolon structure is intended to call attention to its difference from the other verses and to emphasize it as the pivotal verse of the psalm.

7.a. Reading the perfect of the verb "to give" as characteristic or perfect of experience (actions which are usually repeated and expected).

7.b. Or, "increase/produce." See *Form/Structure/Setting and Comment*.

7.c. Reading the imperfect as jussive with progressive frequentative force.

7.d. "Yahweh, our God" is intended.

Form/Structure/Setting

This psalm presents major problems in determining the mood and tense of the verbs. A number of interpreters prefer to read the imperfects in vv 2, 7b, and 8 (and in some cases in vv 4, 5, and 6) as present indicatives expressing general or characteristic action (so, e.g., Eerdmans: "Elohim [God] is merciful and blesseth us . . . the clans confess thee . . . the peoples are glad . . ."; however, changing to present perfect in v 7: "The earth has yielded her increase, Elohim our God blesseth us . . .") or as present perfect (e.g., Leslie, 112):

God has been gracious to us and blessed us,
and has caused his face to shine upon us, . . .
Let the peoples give thee thanks, O God; . . .
The earth has yielded its produce; . . .
God blesses us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

(cf. *RSV* for vv 7-8). Gunkel goes to past tense by changing the imperfect of דָּדַע ("be gracious") in v 2 to perfect and the following imperfect to an imperfect with *waw* consecutive: "Yahweh [God] was gracious to us and blessed us." Crüsemann (199-201) follows Michel (*Tempora und Satzstellung*, 115-16) and reads the imperfect as general/characteristic: "God is gracious to us and blesses us" (vv 7b, 8); "God, our God blesses us, God blesses us." However, vv 4-6 are requests for praise in hymnic form: "Let the peoples praise you, O God . . . for you judge the peoples with equity . . . Let the peoples praise you" (Leslie, 112, calls v 5 a "little hymn complete in itself").

The decision is a difficult one, but I have decided that the psalm is most likely to be a prayer rather than a thanksgiving psalm and that vv 2, 7, and 8 should be expressed in this mode. The reasons are as follows: (1) LXX indicates jussive verbs, except in 7a; (2) the probability that the verbs in v 2 are jussive is good, and, if so, it is likely that the verbs in 7b-8 are also, because these colons match v 2 in the structure of the poem (Crüsemann, 200); (3) the perfect in 7a may be read as precativ or optative (so Dahood, 126; *CBQ* 32 [1970] 632-33), but I have chosen to read it as characteristic: "the earth yields its produce," perhaps recalling Lev 26:4 (cf. Ezek 34:27), with the following prayer language asking for a continuation of that process. The statement in 7a forms the basis for the supplication in vv 2, 7b, and 8. Since the earth regularly yields harvests, it is reasonable to ask God to continue his blessing in that form.

The centerpiece of the psalm is v 5, which is surrounded on either side by a refrain in vv 4 and 6. V 5 is a tricolon with "peoples" (using two different words) repeated in each colon—in fact, "peoples" is found in each of the seven colons of vv 4-6. The major theme of the psalm is the importance of Yahweh's blessing Israel for the peoples of the world (Crüsemann, 201). V 3 is a statement of purpose for God's blessing on Israel and should be read with vv 4-6. The prayer for mercy and blessing in v 2 is matched by the prayer for blessing in vv 7b-8a. V 8a sets forth the same agenda as v 2a.

The psalm has frequently been read as a thanksgiving psalm for the harvest festival (S. Mowinckel, *PIW*, I, 120, 185; II, 30; with interesting detail, Leslie, 111). However, I prefer to read the psalm as a prayer for blessing, a plural self-benediction reflecting the Aaronic Benediction of Num 6:23-6. The speaker is not identified, but it is plausible to think of a priest leading a congregation in a prayer for blessing which will bring forth praise and reverence for Yahweh from the peoples of the world. An appropriate context would be that of a harvest/New Year festival, of course, or perhaps a congregational benediction at the end of a worship occasion (see C. Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, 42-45). A time before festival-goers left to go back to their home-places and routine lives would have been an effective context for the recitation of the psalm. The Jewish practice of reciting this psalm at the termination of the Sabbath is

worth noting and should remind us that the psalm was not necessarily confined to any given context of worship.

The psalm provides little hard evidence for dating, being devoid of even a Davidic reference in the superscription. Several historical-critical scholars (e.g., Buitenwieser, Oesterley, Leslie, Taylor) date the psalm to the post-exilic era because of its seeming dependence on the Aaronic Benediction in Num 6:23-6 in the Priestly material of the Pentateuch and because its Deutero-Isaiah-like universalism. On the other hand, W. F. Albright ("The Psalm of Habakkuk," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. H. H. Rowley [New York: Scribner, 1950], 6) declared that Ps 67, at least in its nucleus, goes back to the Tabernacle cultus in pre-monarchical Israel, a judgment made on the basis of his conclusion regarding Canaanite diction and imagery in the psalms. H. Jefferson (*VT* 12 [1962] 201-5) refined Albright's vocabulary comparison with Ugaritic (Canaanite) roots and found a 71 percent correlation. She concluded that her analysis supports a pre-exilic origin for the psalm. However, the vocabulary parallels of a short psalm with Ugaritic roots, made up of words with rather common usage in the OT, are not very persuasive for dating. The assumption that the psalm must be post-exilic because it is later than the Aaronic Benediction is equally unpersuasive because it is widely recognized that sections in the Priestly material of the Pentateuch (like Num 6:23-6) may be read as much older than their contexts. The psalm may be pre-exilic, but the emphasis on the peoples of the world and their relation to Yahweh points toward the post-exilic Israelite communities, when these communities must frequently have felt overwhelmed by the non-Israelite peoples around them, seemingly controlling the world. It is possible that the psalm is a composite creation from the post-exilic period made up of parts from exilic psalms. Vv 2, 7, and 8 could be from a thanksgiving-harvest song (reading "God has been merciful and he has blessed us . . . the earth has produced a harvest . . . Yahweh, our God has blessed us . . ."), and a hymnic section focused on the saving ways and judgments of Yahweh may be found in vv 4-6. If this should be correct, the redaction of originally separate parts has resulted in a new compositional genre.

Comment

Initial supplication (67:2). V 2 is an adaptation of the Aaronic Benediction found in Num 6:22-27:

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons, 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."

(RSV)

For the term "be gracious" (or "have mercy") see *Comment* on Ps 51:3. The major difference between the Num 6 passage and v 2 is that the speaker in the latter is

identified with the recipients of blessing—he/she prays not that Yahweh will bless "you," but that he will bless "us." The blessing of God manifests itself in different ways, but it is especially the intensification of life in such ways as to empower growth, fertility, and prosperity (Deut 7:13; 28:3-6). The blessing of God consists in his ongoing presence in life, his sustaining of the well-being of the world, and his providing family (Ps 128), food (Ps 132:15), dew (Ps 133:3), rain (Hos 6:3), etc. A. A. Anderson (478, on 66:20) remarks, "In a sense God's blessing was not an independent force, but rather the active help of God himself, so that one could not have the blessing without the giver." The presence of God comes with his blessing.

The shining forth of the face of God among his people is a metaphor for his goodwill and blessing (cf. Pss 4:7; 31:17; 44:4; 80:4, 8, 20; 89:16; 119:135). A shining, bright face reveals a person of good disposition and is a sign of inward pleasure. "In the light of a king's face there is life, / and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain" (Prov 16:15, rsv). The opposite of God's shining face is his hidden face. When God hides his face, the life of his people is endangered (cf. Pss 10:1; 13:2; 30:8; 44:25; 104:29; Deut 31:18).

The hymnic core of the psalm (67:3-6). V 3 provides the basis for the calls to thankful praise in v 4. When the peoples of the earth know about God's (Yahweh's) ways (or, "power") and saving-work in Israel, they should respond with gratitude and praise. "Knowing" is not restricted to mental cognition; it includes experiential knowing and action. The "way of God" is a multifaceted concept (see M. H. Pope, *IDB*, IV, 817-18; K. Koch et al., *TDOT*, III, 270-93). The basic physical sense of the word is that of a stretch of road or of a journey. The metaphysical senses involve behavior and related matters such as "power." The meaning in v 3a seems closely linked with "saving-work" in 3b: The ongoing manifestations of the saving-work of Yahweh make known his will, especially in his choice of the Israelites and their "way" through history. There is merit in understanding "way" here in the sense of "dominion" or "power" (as does Dahood, II, 123), which matches well with "saving-work" or "victorious deliverance" in 3b. Yahweh's work in and through Israel is worthy of the praise of the nations.

A second call to rejoice and praise is found in v 5 with reasons attached. Yahweh "judges"—sets right things which are out of order—with equity, and he guides the peoples through their time on earth, though they may not know him (Isa 45:1-4). He guides the peoples of the earth as a shepherd does the sheep (note the use of the verb נָחַד in Pss 23:3; 78:52-3; also, see Exod 13:17; 15:13; Deut 32:12; Pss 77:21; 78:14; cf. Job 12:23). The God who exercises saving judgment and guidance for Israel does the same among the peoples of the world (for Yahweh as judge of the world, see Pss 58:12; 82:8; 94:2; 96:13; 98:9).

Concluding supplication (67:7-8). The prayer for God's blessing returns in 7b and 8a. A new basis is given for the blessing in v 7. The earth normally yields a harvest, understanding that it is made that way by Yahweh and empowered by his blessing. The "harvest" of v 7 is an attempt to get the meaning of יְבוּלָהּ, which could be "its increase" or "its production." The word is used primarily of agricultural productivity (Lev 26:4, 20; Deut 11:17; 32:22; Pss 78:46; 85:13; Ezek 34:27; Zech 8:12; Job 20:28). It may refer to the possessions or wealth of a household. The word probably carries a very old concept of the earth bearing fruit because of the blessing of a deity (cf. Gen 1:11-12, 28-30). Every harvest was

a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise (Lev 26:4) and a demonstration of his blessing. The prayer which follows in 7b-8a is for a continuation of the blessing process. The blessing of earthly production is a visible token of the whole range of Yahweh's blessings, which merits the reverence of the inhabitants of the whole earth ("ends of the earth," see Ps 59:14).

Explanation

This psalm seems to involve two major subjects: blessing and the spread of life-giving knowledge of Yahweh to the people of the earth. As noted above, blessing is a multifaceted concept when used both of one human being to another and from God to human beings. Perhaps it is true to say that at its most fundamental level "blessing really means the power of fertility. God's blessing causes a developing and growing, a ripening and fruit-bearing, silent advance of the power of life in all realms" (C. Westermann, "Creation and History in the Old Testament," *The Gospel and Human Destiny*, ed. V. Vajta, 30-31, quoted by P. D. Miller, Jr., "The Blessing of God: An Interpretation of Numbers 6:22-27," *Int* 29 [1975] 24-27). The blessing of God takes diverse forms: posterity (Gen 26:23; 28:3), prosperity and wealth (Gen 24:35; Deut. 7:12-13), land (Gen 35:12; 48:3), the removal of the curse from the ground (Gen 8:21-2), fertility, health, and victory (Deut 7:14-16). The summary of blessings in Deut 28:1-6 conveys something of the comprehensive range of Yahweh's blessings.

If you obey the voice of the LORD your God . . . all these
blessings shall come upon you and overtake you . . .
Blessed shall you be in the city, and
blessed shall you be in the field.
Blessed shall be the fruit of your body,
and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the
increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock.
Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough.
Blessed shall you be when you come in, and
blessed shall you be when you go out. (RSV)

Perhaps what we miss here is overt mention of the spiritual dimensions of blessing. However, this is provided for in the Aaronic Benediction and in v 2 of our psalm by the face of God shining among his people in favor and fellowship. Further, the comprehensive nature of blessing encompasses both the physical side of life and its inner nature. Stuhlmüller comments: "God's blessings reach us first externally and physically, and then as we reflect upon our lives and the world, they seep ever more deeply into our thought and judgments." (300)

The blessing of God is closely linked with contexts of worship in the OT. The most appropriate place for blessing (however, not the only one; cf. Ps 118:26) is at the end of a worship service or festival (cf. 2 Sam 6:18; Lev 9:22; Westermann, *Blessing*, 43, 103-8). Mowinckel notes and emphasizes the worship-relatedness of blessing:

All worship reached its culmination in the priestly words of blessing. It was in order to receive blessing and make it secure in all its forms, that Israel, as a community and also as individuals, went to the sanctuary and took part in the worship offered there . . . through worship and all its rites, blessing was achieved, made secure and increased for individuals and for the community. (*Religion und Kultus*, 64, translated and quoted in Westermann, *Blessing*, 20)

Thus blessing is a bridge that joins worship with the ongoing life of the community outside the place of worship: "What has happened there is imparted to those who now leave one another to return to their daily lives" (Westermann, *Blessing*, 106). The benediction at the end of a worship service is a prayer that the blessing received at the sanctuary will go with the worshipers and link the going out of the worshipers with the ongoing blessing of God in all the fundamental aspects of their lives.

Westermann has argued for a distinction between God's saving action in the sense of acts of attention or intervention and the continuous action of God's blessing (see his *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, tr. D. W. Stott [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982], 102-4). Blessing is not a series of events as much as "the quiet, continuous, flowing, and unnoticed worship of God which cannot be captured in moments or dates" (103). Blessing runs through the growing, maturing, and fading of life, the providence of God in history and nature. As such, blessing is present outside the particular history of Israel (as in Job, the man from Uz) and has a scope wide enough to be common to all humankind. "Because the blessing (e.g., Gen 1:27-30) is given to all living things, it has universal character" (Westermann, 116). Thus the "spreading circle" (Kidner) of Ps 67, based on the concept of blessing, quite naturally reaches out to encompass the action of God to the ends of the earth. Cohen quotes a remarkable summary of Ps 67 from I. Abrahams, *Annotations to the Hebrew Prayer Book, Pharisaism and the Gospels*:

This psalm is a prayer for salvation in the widest sense, and not for Israel only, but for the whole world. Israel's blessing is to be a blessing for all men. Here, in particular, the Psalmist does more than adopt the Priestly formula (Num 6:22-27); he claims for Israel the sacerdotal dignity. Israel is the world's high priest . . . if Israel has the light of God's face, the world cannot remain in darkness.

Thus the psalm invites a messianic perspective which looks forward to an age when the relationship between Yahweh's saving-work in Israel and his blessing-work in all creation will no longer be obscure but will lead the peoples of the world to rejoice and sing of his judgments and guidance (v 5).

Blessed Be God (68:1-36)

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