

January 15

Lesson 7

PRAISE GOD

THE PROVIDER

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 66:1-5

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Psalms 65; 67:6, 7

PSALM 65

- ¹ Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
- ² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.
- ³ When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave our transgressions.
- ⁴ Blessed are those you choose
and bring near to live in your courts!
We are filled with the good things of your house,
of your holy temple.
- ⁵ You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Savior,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,
- ⁶ who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
- ⁷ who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.
- ⁸ The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.
- ⁹ You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
- ¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
- ¹² The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
- ¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.

KEY VERSE

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.—Psalm 65:5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List ways the earth is a testimony to God's creative power.
2. Compare and contrast the perceived source of material bounty from the viewpoints of the psalmist and today's culture.
3. Sing a hymn or worship song that praises God as provider and sustainer.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Waiting for Rain
- B. Lesson Background

I. People's Praise (Psalm 65:1-4)

- A. Because God Hears (vv. 1, 2)
Taking Vows Seriously
- B. Because God Purges (v. 3)
- C. Because God Blesses (v. 4)

II. Psalmist's Analysis (Psalm 65:5-8)

- A. How God Answers (vv. 5-7)
- B. What God Reveals (v. 8)

III. God's Blessings (Psalm 65:9-13)

- A. On the Land (vv. 9, 10)
Prayer Tendencies
- B. On the Flocks (vv. 11-13)

Conclusion

- A. Wrong Path
- B. Right Path
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Waiting for Rain

My state of Nebraska is an agricultural powerhouse. Rich soil, flat land, and sufficient rain make this possible. There has been plenty of rain this year, and record harvests are predicted. But this was not the case two years ago. The usual summer rains did not come. Fields languished in drought conditions. The harvest was a disaster for many farmers.

Science can explain how the cycle of precipitation works, even predict rain with some accuracy, but no technology exists to bring rain reliably. So we wait and pray. We don't understand how God controls the rain, but we believe that he does—so we ask for his help. When we pray for rain, we are not asking "Mother Nature" to provide it!

Psalm 65 presents God as the Creator of the systems of the earth, and the one in control of these systems. The psalmist surely knew of years when Israel suffered drought, and crops were meager. Yet his confidence remained in God. If God is powerful enough to create the earth, surely he is powerful enough to control the earth and its weather. God did not create something bigger than he!

Some religions of antiquity had separate gods for creation and weather. For example, Canaanite religion featured an ancient creator god who had withdrawn from human affairs. By contrast, their most worshipped deity was the weather or storm god, the one whom they sought to appease and please with their sacrifices. No such nonsense for the psalmist! There is only one God, and he has never withdrawn from his creation.

B. Lesson Background

Many psalms have superscriptions (see discussion in the Lesson Background of [lesson 5](#)). [Psalm 65](#) is one that does, and the superscription introduces what follows as being “A psalm of David. A song.” Thus King David, “the hero of Israel’s songs” ([2 Samuel 23:1](#)), is the author.

The superscribed introduction also indicates it was “For the director of music.” This is more than a dedication. It serves as permission for the composition to be used by those who orchestrated the musical praise for Israel’s national celebrations. The psalm serves to reveal the heart of the man whom the Lord selected to be king of his chosen nation, a man after God’s own heart ([Acts 13:22](#)).

The Israel of David’s era seems to have been a nation of singers and instrumentalists ([1 Chronicles 13:8](#); etc.). They had no electronic amplification. They had no technology to allow projection of words on a screen. And Israelite worship did not feature songs that people had been listening to all week on personal devices. Instead, worship featured heartfelt songs sung from memory, sung with passion and conviction.

[Psalm 65](#) seems to have been one those.

I. People’s Praise

([PSALM 65:1-4](#))

A. Because God Hears ([vv. 1, 2](#))

**¹ Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.**

The psalm begins dramatically by addressing the Lord. The address is an invitation for the Lord to be the audience for the upcoming service of *praise*. The people will not be there *in Zion* to celebrate themselves. Since the praise service is for God, it cannot begin without his presence.

A further clarification of purpose presents itself in the mention of *vows*. The vows to *be fulfilled* are, in various ways, dedications of loyalty to the Lord (compare [Numbers 6:21](#); [30:2](#); [Deuteronomy 23:21](#); [Psalm 116:18](#); etc.). This helps us understand the reference to *Zion*. There is no temple in Jerusalem in David’s day, but *Zion* is the designated place of worship for the people of Israel. It is the hill upon which the City of David has been built (see [2 Samuel 5:7](#)). It is the holy place for the king’s residence (see [Psalm 2:6](#)). And now the Lord, the great king, is being invited to join the celebrants in his beloved place (see [Psalm 78:68](#)). Worship includes dedicating oneself to God.

HOW TO SAY IT

Canaanite *Kay-nun-ite*.

panentheism *pah-**nen(t)**-thee-izum*.

pantheism *pan(t)-thee-ih-zum*.

Zion *Zi-un*.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to improve our praise?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In inviting God to be the audience

In clarifying purpose(s)

Other

TAKING VOWS SERIOUSLY

Did you make any vows for the new year of 2017? Or do you consider New Year’s resolutions a tradition that has outworn its welcome? Many people still take the idea seriously (at least for a few days into the new year) as they vow to do better in setting goals, changing habits, etc.

Various kinds of vows, how they are made, and how they are fulfilled or broken are familiar. For example, marriage vows at their finest express God’s ideals by which a man and a woman agree to order their marriage henceforth. Given the high percentage of divorce among Christians, one wonders why the vow was not kept.

The New Testament has important things to say about the taking of oaths or vows (see [Matthew 5:33-37](#); [23:16-22](#); [Acts 18:18](#); [Hebrews 6:16](#); [James 5:12](#)). While studying those, we may arrive at different conclusions regarding the form, content, and context of oaths/vows appropriate for the New Testament era. But who can doubt that promises—whether made to God or others—should be taken seriously? A vague resolution to “be more faithful” to God in the coming year will not be nearly as motivating as a vow tied to a specific carry through. That’s what the psalmist has in mind.—C. R. B.

**² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.**

The fact that God does *answer prayer* implies (1) that people pray to him and (2) he does more than just listen to prayers—he also responds. With notable exceptions ([Proverbs 28:9](#); [Isaiah 1:15](#); [Jeremiah 7:16](#); [Lamentations 3:44](#); etc.), prayers receive his full attention (compare [Proverbs 15:8, 29](#); [Isaiah 38:5](#); [Jeremiah 29:12](#); [1 Peter 3:12](#); etc.). His ability to pay attention to millions of prayers simultaneously teaches us something important about his power!

How can this be? How can God attend to millions of prayers at the same time? The psalmist does not explain here, but consider that time as we experience it does not limit or bind God (see [2 Peter 3:8](#)). Our timeless, ageless Lord does not need to hurry through the prayers that come to him. In ways that are beyond our understanding, God is able to give all the attention he desires to each prayer, whether that prayer be a word of praise, thanksgiving, or request (compare [Daniel 9:23](#); [Acts 10:4](#)).

All people are to come only before the Lord with prayer. When the pagan neighbors of Israel pray to their fictitious gods of mountains, rivers, the sun, etc., they miss the only valid prayer destination in the universe.

B. Because God Purges (v. 3)

3. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.

The psalmist wastes no time in addressing the biggest barrier to worship: *sins* and *transgressions* (compare [Psalm 32:5](#)). The fact that God is the one who forgives them is what makes worship possible. The word translated *forgave* is the vitally important Old Testament word that is rendered “make atonement” in many other places. Only God in his mercy and grace can grant the forgiveness the worshipper needs—and he does! See [Micah 7:18](#).

What Do You Think?

What can we do to ensure that sin does not hinder worship?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Considering the seriousness of sin
- Considering how sin is conquered
- Regarding sins committed against you
- Other

C. Because God Blesses (v. 4)

4. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

Those who are forgiven ([v. 3](#)) are the ones God chooses. Everyone is eligible to be forgiven, but forgiveness by the Almighty is not earned. Nor is it some kind of inalienable right. Rather, it is a deliberate act of the willing God on the repentant.

Being forgiven and chosen has the immediate privilege of being allowed to come *near to* the Lord. The psalmist continues this figurative depiction in terms of being admitted to the Lord’s *holy temple*; this implies close fellowship. The presence of the Lord is signified by viewing his *house* and his *holy temple* as one and the same (see [Ezra 3:10, 11](#); [Zechariah 8:9](#)).

There is value in having a dedicated place for worship, a sanctuary for corporate praise and prayer. It is true that we can worship the Lord even while driving in heavy freeway traffic, but that will not be without distractions. Nor will it have the sense of holiness of which the psalmist speaks. Although God does not live in our church buildings (compare [Acts 17:24](#)), efforts to create appropriate space for worship will not go unrewarded.

II. Psalmist’s Analysis

(PSALM 65:5-8)

A. How God Answers (vv. 5-7)

5a. You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior,

The psalmist now begins to consider the vast scope of God’s power. The Hebrew word behind the translation *awesome* carries the sense of causing fear (example [Psalm 76:7](#)). Indeed, the *awesome and righteous deeds* that form God’s response to us should result in reverential fear on our part. We do not cower in dread, because the fact that God is *our Savior* removes any reason for such a posture. This just as true for us as it was for the ancient psalmist (compare [Isaiah 41:10](#)).

**5b. the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,**

The fact stated in [verse 5a](#) leads the psalmist to proclaim the universal, worldwide reach of human appreciation for God's mighty acts. He and he alone is the one in whom to place *hope* for salvation. This is true even in the most remote location the psalmist can imagine. Since God has created everything, he is not merely the national God of Israel. All people must look to him (compare [Psalm 22:27](#); [Jeremiah 32:27](#)).

**6, 7. who formed the mountains by your power,
having armed yourself with strength,
who stilled the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the turmoil of the nations.**

How did *the mountains* get here? Who had a wagon big enough to transport them to the right place? Why does *the roaring of the seas* and *their waves* eventually become calm and quiet instead of continuing indefinitely? For the psalmist, the answer is inescapable: only God is powerful enough to bring about such things, for he is the master of that which he has created.

What Do You Think?

What would you say to someone for whom relief from a violent force of nature came about only after his or her house was destroyed?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

If victim reasons that God is evil or powerless

If victim reasons that randomly destructive forces of nature prove there is no God

If victim says the loss is punishment for sin

The psalmist extends this last illustration into human affairs. We know all too well of the warlike propensities of humans, their *turmoil* ([Psalm 2:1](#)). Someone rises to power and wants to gain prestige and wealth, so armies march, battles wage, and chaos ensues.

We understand (and hate) the impulse to violence and war, but do we understand peace? Why is there ever any peace at all and not continual war? The psalmist teaches us that peace between nations, even temporary peace, is brought about only by the intention and power of the Lord. The God who calms the seas also calms *the nations*, for he is master of both ([Psalm 22:28](#); [Isaiah 17:12, 13](#)).

B. What God Reveals (v. 8)

8a. The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;

We need not picture our psalmist as a world traveler or a master of world geography to appreciate what he says here. He knows that every part of the earth has evidence of God's *wonders*, a word frequently found alongside the word "signs" (example: [Jeremiah 32:21](#)).

The psalmist makes this affirmation not because he's personally seen the awe of the people who live in *the whole earth*. The statement comes from faith. He is completely convinced that each and every part of the earth testifies to its residents concerning the power of God the Creator. How could it be otherwise?

8b. where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.

The psalmist uses another aspect of creation that everyone has experienced: the cycle of the days. Creation passages such as [Psalm 104:19-23](#) reflect this enduring feature of life.

Whether from today's vantage point or that of the psalmist, the rising and the setting of the sun is the most dependable aspect of our natural world we can imagine. We expect that when night falls, daybreak will follow within a few hours. Weather has varying degrees of predictability, but not the daily cycle of sunrise and sunset (compare [Joshua 10:12-14](#); [Psalm 72:5](#); exception: [Zechariah 14:6, 7](#)).

The psalmist further pictures this cycle as a way in which nature rejoices. Such witness testifies to the power and faithfulness of God (compare [Psalm 148:3](#)).

III. God's Blessings

(PSALM 65:9-13)

A. On the Land (vv. 9, 10)

**9. You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.**

**The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,**

for so you have ordained it.

The psalm now moves into territory that makes it fitting for use at the time of a harvest celebration. While we may rightly bemoan either too little or too much rain, the psalmist chooses not to complain. All waters are blessings from God, who provides the necessities of life.

This is expressed in terms we might miss if we are not careful. *The streams of God* of which the psalmist speaks contrast with the religions of the ancient world that believe in a god for every river or stream. The pagans sacrifice to and serve these local gods so that rivers will be full. The Israelites do not see their Lord as such a dinky deity. He is the Lord of all rivers; he is the master of all water. The psalmist is grateful.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can our stewardship of the environment be a witness for the Creator?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Concerning conservation initiatives
- Concerning reactions to natural disasters
- Regarding personal, everyday practices
- Other

**¹⁰. You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.**

This is a beautiful picture of gentle rain coming at just the right time. The fact that such rain brings needed moisture to the *furrows* and *ridges* of a plowed field speaks to the knowledge and graciousness of the one who “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” ([Matthew 5:45](#)).

PRAYER TENDENCIES

Many people who don’t ordinarily pray did so as a drought extended itself across the southern U.S. from 2010 to 2013. Drought conditions covered about 60 percent of the lower 48 states by January 2013, with Canada and Mexico affected to varying degrees.

Human nature is such that we tend not to credit God with blessings received. But when things go badly, even people who don’t ordinarily pray may seek divine relief. The psalmist observes that the earth itself praises God for his bounty. Christians more than anyone should be praising God continually for the necessities of life that he provides daily through his creation.

Try the following experiment. First, think back on your prayers for the past three days and add up the number of requests in those prayers. Then add up the number of praises offered for what you already have. When you compare the two tallies, do you see a problem?—C. R. B.

B. On the Flocks ([vv. 11-13](#))

**^{11,12}. You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.**

These are words of harvest celebration. Well-stocked supermarkets have isolated most of us from the wonder and joy of harvest time. We might sing “Come, ye thankful people, come” in our Thanksgiving service, but we might not see much need to “raise the song of harvest home.”

Not so with our psalmist! He has experienced God’s *bounty* in a successful harvest. The phrase *carts overflow with abundance* sketches a picture of a harvest so great that some of its produce is falling off the wagons onto the farm roadways! But no one is concerned because there is plenty.

Even the *grasslands of the wilderness* are lush, so the grazing animals will fatten nicely and provide milk and meat. The richness of God’s creation at harvest time is so marvelous that it is as if the earth itself is involved in worship, for the *hills* themselves are said to be glad.

What Do You Think?

How do the coronation passages [Psalms 8:5](#); [103:4](#); [Song of Songs 3:11](#); and [Isaiah 23:8](#) enrich your understanding of this one? How will this influence your life in the week ahead?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding passages where God performs the coronation
- Passages where something or someone other than God performs the coronation

**¹³. The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;**

they shout for joy and sing.

Agricultural abundance is the result of God's blessing and providential grace. The *flocks*, meaning primarily sheep and goats, are thriving. The flocks are so abundant, it is almost as if *the meadows* themselves are clothed in sheep's wool! This word picture is extended to *the valleys*, now fully clothed with waves of *grain* ready to be harvested.

The psalmist ends by concluding that this great, rich harvest is an expression of *joy* by the earth. The land is said to *sing* as it produces our food, for that is its purpose in God's created order (see [Genesis 1:29, 30](#)). If the earth itself is praising its Creator for using it to the full, can we do any less?

Conclusion

A. Wrong Path

Pantheism is the false belief that all things are God. Closely related is the belief that God is *in* all things (panentheism). These beliefs are popular today among some people who want to be "spiritual" but reject "religions." Sometimes, pantheists point to Bible texts like [Psalm 65](#) to justify their views, claiming the psalmist extols creation itself as being worthy of worship. The psalmist's depictions of the earth's singing for joy, etc., are thereby misinterpreted to signify that the world is a living entity, capable of offering praise to God just as humans do.

Make no mistake: a pantheistic reading of this psalm is incorrect. The psalmist does indeed marvel as he looks around at creation, but he does not pause to worship created things. He sees creation as evidence of the greatness and kindness of the one who stands behind it: the Creator.

God the Creator is a person in [Psalm 65](#), worthy to be praised and worshipped. Part of the created order is that we are persons too. Our personhood in no way makes us equal to God, but reflects the intention in his design that we are capable of having a personal relationship with him.

We should respect God's creation, but we should never worship it. Pantheists are looking in the right direction, but they stop before they get to the mighty Creator of the universe. He is the uncreated God who loves, forgives, and cares for us.



Visual for Lesson 7. Start a discussion by pointing to each of the four words in turn as you ask, “Why is this word important in our application of [Psalm 65](#)?”

B. Right Path

The contents of [Psalm 65](#) suggest praise during a harvest celebration. These community gatherings may have been where the people of Israel learned the words and music of the psalm. But a psalm such as this would also have lent itself to home worship, to be taught to children and sung as a praise and thanksgiving song before the weekly minifeast of Sabbath day.

[Psalm 65](#) still serves us well today, whether as a personal expression of praise or for lending words to corporate worship. May we honor the Lord with our hearts full of thanksgiving. May our voices of joy join with the witness of earth as we lift our praises to the Lord, the Creator of all.

C. Prayer

Holy God, we praise you for providing for our needs. May we focus on our blessings, not on what we think we lack. We pray this in the name of the one who was and is your greatest blessing: your Son, Jesus. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

May praise for the Lord always be waiting in our hearts.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following quotation on the board. Include the underlining that we have added.

My main goal is to be a self-made man and have control over what's mine.

—Actor Kevin Hart

Discuss the quote. Ask, “In what ways do you agree with the attitudes expressed in this quote? In what ways do you disagree? Why are the underlined words significant?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Self-Made” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study saying, “We rightly recognize that some people were born into situations that were difficult. We rightly salute those people who showed extraordinary effort to rise above those circumstances and to succeed. But is it accurate to label such people as self-made? Let’s look at [Psalm 65](#), which addresses that very issue.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group one of the following self-made arguments to refute by using their assigned portion of [Psalm 65](#). Expected responses are in italics, but do not distribute those.

Group 1—I am a self-made believer. I follow my own path to God ([vv. 1-4](#)).

Whom do you praise and to whom do you pray—a god you imagine? ([vv. 1, 2](#)).

Who forgives your sins? Or do you believe that you sin at all? ([v. 3](#))

With whom do you share your faith? Isn’t it lonely not meeting with those who follow a God-made path to Him? ([v. 4](#))

Group 2—I am a self-made seeker. I just want to rise above this world and connect to the great life force ([vv. 5-8](#)).

Is this world a meaningless accident, or is it God’s response to us, telling us that He is there? ([v. 5](#))

How do you explain how the earth came to be? ([v. 6](#)).

To whom do you turn when this world is a hostile place? ([vv. 7, 8](#))

Group 3—The earth is our mother. She came into being by herself and birthed us as well ([vv. 9-13](#)).

Doesn’t that make nature a god rather than something created and sustained by God? ([vv. 9, 10](#))

Can the earth take care of itself? Can’t we see in our own lives that anything not cared for falls apart? ([vv. 10-13](#)).

Into Life

Several years ago, a Christian band called NewSong released a song called “God Made Man.” Obtain that song from a CD or purchase it inexpensively from a reputable music-download website.

Play the song and compare it to the ideas found in [Psalm 65](#). Ask, “In what ways does the world’s view of a self-made man contrast with the biblical view of being made and sustained by God?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “God-Made” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs to look up Scriptures and unscramble the statements.

Follow either activity with a closing prayer asking God to help us look to him and not ourselves to provide all that we need. If time permits, sing some hymns or choruses of worshipful praise.