
For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David. A song.

PSALM 65: 1 Praise waits for you, God, in Zion. To you shall vows be performed.

God is praised for the fulfillment of his promises, and for his mercy in forgiving sins, Psa 65:1-3. He is praised for the wonders that he works in nature, which all mankind must acknowledge, Psa 65:4-8; for the fertilizing showers which he sends upon the earth, and the abundance thereby produced both for men and cattle, Psa 65:9-13.

The title, "To the chief Musician or conqueror, a Psalm and Song of David." So the Hebrew; and, in effect, the Chaldee, Ethiopic, and best copies of the Septuagint. The Arabic has, "A Psalm of David concerning the transmigration of the people."

The Vulgate is singular: "A Psalm of David. A hymn of Jeremiah and Ezekiel for the people of the transmigration, when they began to go out," from Babylon, understood. This title is of no authority; it neither accords with the subject of the Psalm, nor with the truth of history. Calmet has very properly remarked that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were never found together, to compose this Psalm, neither before at, nor after the captivity. It should therefore be utterly rejected. In the Complutensian edition Haggai is added to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, all with equal propriety.

It is supposed to have been written after a great drought, when God had sent a plentiful rain on the land. I rather think that there was no direct drought or rain in the prophet's view, but a celebration of the praises of God for his giving rain and fruitful seasons, and filling men's mouths with food, and their hearts with gladness. There is a particular providence manifested in the quantity of rain that falls upon the earth, which can neither be too much admired nor praised.

Verse 1

Praise waiteth for thee - Praise is silent or dumb for thee. Thou alone art worthy of praise; all other perfections are lost in thine; and he who considers thee aright can have no other subject of adoration.

Unto thee shall the vow be performed - All offerings and sacrifices should be made to thee. All human spirits are under obligation to live to and serve thee. All Jews and Christians, by circumcision and baptism, belong to thee; and they are all bound to pay the vow of their respective covenants to thee alone; and the spirit of this vow is, to love thee with all their powers and to serve thee with a perfect heart and willing mind, all the days of their life.

PSALM 65: 2 You who hear prayer, to you all men will come.

Verse 2

Unto thee shall all flesh come - All human beings should pray to God; and from him alone the sufficient portion of human spirits is to be derived. It is supposed to be a prediction of the calling of the Gentiles to the faith of the Gospel of Christ. A minister, immensely corpulent, began his address to God in the pulpit with these words: "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come!"

and most unluckily laid a strong emphasis on All Flesh. The coincidence was ominous; and I need not say, the people were not edified, for the effect was ludicrous. I mention this fact, which fell under my own notice, to warn those who minister in righteousness to avoid expressions which may be capable, from a similar circumstance, of a ludicrous application. I have known many good men who, to their no small grief, have been encumbered with a preternatural load of muscles; an evil to be deprecated and deplored.

PSALM 65: 3 Sins overwhelmed me, but you atoned for our transgressions.

Verse 3

Iniquities prevail against me - This is no just rendering of the original, דברי עונת גברו מני dibrey avonoth gaberu menni; "iniquitous words have prevailed against me," or, "The words of iniquity are strong against me." All kinds of calumnies, lies, and slanders have been propagated, to shake my confidence, and ruin my credit.

Our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away - Whatsoever offenses we have committed against thee, thou wilt pardon; תכפרם tecapperem, thou wilt make atonement for them, when with hearty repentance and true faith we turn unto thee. This verse has been abused to favor Antinomian licentiousness. The true and correct translation of the former clause will prevent this.

The old Scottish Version of this verse, in their singing Psalms, is most execrable: - "Iniquities, I must confess,

Prevail against me do:

And as for our trans-gres-sions

Them purge away wilt thou."

O David, if thou art capable of hearing such abominable doggerel substituted for the nervous words thou didst compose by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, what must thou feel, if chagrin can affect the inhabitants of heaven!

PSALM 65: 4 Blessed is one whom you choose, and cause to come near, that he may live in your courts. We will be filled with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

Verse 4

Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth - This is spoken in reference to the priests who were chosen of God to minister at the tabernacle; and who were permitted to approach, draw nigh, to the Divine Majesty by the various offerings and sacrifices which they presented.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house - Though we are not priests, and have not the great felicity to minister before thee in holy things; yet we can worship at thy temple, feel the outpouring of thy Spirit, and be made happy with the blessings which thou dispensest there to thy true worshippers.

PSALM 65: 5 By awesome deeds of righteousness, you answer us, God of our salvation. You who are the hope of all the ends of the earth, of those who are far away on the sea;

Verse 5

By terrible things in righteousness - The Vulgate joins this clause to the preceding verse: "Thy holy temple is wonderful in righteousness: thou wilt hear us, O God of our salvation." But the psalmist may refer to those wonderful displays of God's providence in the change of seasons, and fertilization of the earth; and, consequently, in the sustenance of all animal beings.

The confidence of all the ends of the earth - Thou art the hope of thy people scattered through different parts of the world, and through the isles of the sea. This passage is also understood of the vocation of the Gentiles.

PSALM 65: 6 Who by his power forms the mountains, having armed yourself with strength;

Verse 6

Setteth fast the mountains - It is by thy strength they have been raised, and by thy power they are girded about or preserved. He represents the mountains as being formed and pitched into their proper places by the mighty hand of God; and shows that they are preserved from splitting, falling down, or mouldering away, as it were, by a girdle by which they are surrounded. The image is very fine. They were hooped about by the Divine power.

PSALM 65: 7 who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

Verse 7

Stilleth the noise of the seas - Thou art Sovereign over all the operation of sea and land. Earthquakes are under thy control: so are the flux and reflux of the sea; and all storms and tempests by which the great deep is agitated. Even the headstrong multitude is under thy control; for thou stillest the madness of the people.

PSALM 65: 8 They also who dwell in faraway places are afraid at your wonders. You call the morning's dawn and the evening with songs of joy.

Verse 8

Are afraid at thy tokens - Thunder and lightning, storms and tempests, eclipses and meteors, tornadoes and earthquakes, are proofs to all who dwell even in the remotest parts of the earth, that

there is a Supreme Being who is wonderful and terrible in his acts. By these things an eternal power and Godhead become manifest even to the most barbarous. From this verse to the end of the Psalm there is a series of the finest poetic imagery in the world.

The outgoings of the morning, etc. - The rising and setting sun, the morning and evening twilight, the invariable succession of day and night, are all ordained by thee, and contribute to the happiness and continuance of man and beast. Or, All that fear thee praise thee in the morning, when they go to their work, and in the evening, when they return home, for thy great goodness manifested in the continuance of their strength, and the success of their labor.

PSALM 65: 9 You visit the earth, and water it. You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide them grain, for so you have ordained it.

Verse 9

Thou visitest the earth - God is represented as going through the whole globe, and examining the wants of every part, and directing the clouds how and where to deposit their fertilizing showers, and the rivers where to direct their beneficial courses.

The river of God - Some think the Jordan is meant; and the visiting and watering refer to rain after a long drought. But the clouds may be thus denominated, which properly are the origin of rivers.

Thou preparest them corn - Or, Thou wilt prepare them corn, because "thou hast provided for it." Thou hast made all necessary provision for the fertilization of the earth. Thou hast endued the ground with a vegetative power. Rains, dews, and the genial heat of the sun enable it to put forth that power in providing grass for cattle, and corn for the service of man.

PSALM 65: 10 You drench its furrows. You level its ridges. You soften it with showers. You bless it with a crop.

Verse 10

Thou waterest the ridges - In seedtime thou sendest that measure of rain that is necessary, in order to prepare the earth for the plough; and then, when the ridges are thrown into furrows, thou makest them soft with showers, so as to prepare them for the expansion of the seed, and the vegetation and development of the embryo plant.

Thou blessest the springing thereof - Literally, Thou wilt bless its germinations - its springing buds. Thou watchest over the young sprouts; and it is by thy tender, wise, and provident care that the ear is formed; and by thy bountiful goodness that mature grains fill the ear; and that one produces thirty, sixty, or a hundred or a thousand fold.

PSALM 65: 11 You crown the year with your bounty. Your carts overflow with abundance.

Verse 11

Thou crownest the year - 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; עטרת itarta, Thou encirclest, as with a diadem. A most elegant expression, to show the progress of the sun through the twelve signs of the zodiac, producing the seasons, and giving a sufficiency of light and heat alternately to all places on the surface of the globe, by its north and south declination (amounting to 23 28' at the solstices) on each side of the equator. A more beautiful image could not have been chosen; and the very appearance of the space termed the zodiac on a celestial globe, shows with what propriety the idea of a circle or diadem was conceived by this inimitable poet.

Thy paths drop fatness - מעגליך magaleycha, "thy orbits." The various planets, which all have their revolutions within the zodiacal space, are represented as contributing their part to the general fructification of the year. Or perhaps the solar revolution through the twelve signs, dividing the year into twelve parts or months, may be here intended; the rains of November and February, the frosts and snows of December and January, being as necessary for the fructification of the soil, as the gentle showers of spring, the warmth of summer, and the heat and drought of autumn. The earth's diurnal rotation on its axis, its annual revolution in its orbit, and the moon's course in accompanying the earth, are all wheels or orbits of God, which drop fatness, or produce fertility in the earth.

PSALM 65: 12 The wilderness grasslands overflow. The hills are clothed with gladness.

Verse 12

The pastures of the wilderness - Even the places which are not cultivated have their sufficiency of moisture, so as to render them proper places of pasturage for cattle. The terms wilderness and desert, in the Sacred Writings, mean, in general, places not inhabited and uncultivated, though abounding with timber, bushes, and herbage.

The little hills rejoice - Literally, The hills gird themselves with exultation. The metaphor appears to be taken from the frisking of lambs, bounding of kids, and dancing of shepherds and shepherdesses, in the joy-inspiring summer season.

PSALM 65: 13 The pastures are covered with flocks. The valleys also are clothed with grain. They shout for joy! They also sing.

Verse 13

The pastures are clothed with flocks - Cattle are seen in every plain, avenue, and vista, feeding abundantly; and the valleys are clothed, and wave with the richest harvests; and transports of joy are heard every where in the cheerful songs of the peasantry, the singing of the birds, the neighing of the horse, the lowing of the ox, and the bleating of the sheep. Claudian uses the same image: -

Viridis amictus montium. "The green vesture of the mountains."

Shout for joy, they also sing - They are not loud and unmeaning sounds, they are both music and harmony in their different notes; all together form one great concert, and the bounty of God is the subject which they all celebrate. What an inimitable description! And yet the nervous Hebrew is not half expressed, even by the amended translation and paraphrase above.