

## Prayer

Bring peace into our homes this Christmas time, Lord Jesus. Help us to see beyond the trials of family life, and perceive Your hand at work even through the ups and downs of our earthly relationships. Give us a heart for one another so that we reflect Your goodwill and love in every part of our lives, and bring us the peace for which we long, Lord Jesus: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Christmas

*Pray for all who will struggle this Christmas time because their family life is not good. Pray for those you know and also the millions of children in the world who are orphaned.*

### On-going prayers

- *Give thanks for your home, and everything within in it*
- *Pray for all who work across the world for the health of nations*
- *Pray for the country of Israel and all people who live there*

## Meditation

In the midst of our greatest needs; You, O Lord, are with us.

Your love sustains us,  
Your peace heals us,  
Your mercy covers us,  
Your energy empowers us,  
Your power protects us,  
Your vision guides us,  
Your mission challenges us,  
Your future invites us.

May we never miss the wonder of Your presence,  
By being too wrapped up in ourselves!

## Bible Study - Psalm 67

<sup>1</sup> For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us*

*and make his face shine upon us,*

*Selah*

<sup>2</sup> *To make Your ways known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.*

<sup>3</sup> *Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.*

<sup>4</sup> *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,*

*for you rule the peoples fairly and guide the nations of the earth.*

*Selah*

<sup>5</sup> *Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.*

<sup>6</sup> *The earth has yielded its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.*

<sup>7</sup> *God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.*

## Review

This psalm is a wonderful song of blessing. I have chosen it for this Christmas time because it reminds us that God's purpose and intent is always to bless all people through His just and fair guidance and rule of the nations. The song also reminds us that the proper response of people to the blessing of God is praise, and there are two verses (67:3 and 5) which express this praise in the same way; 'Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.' At Christmas time, something similar happens, because God is present amongst us to bless us and we respond with the praise of our carols. Indeed, this Psalm is one which celebrates the universal message of God's salvation and justice, and Christmas is a time of the year when it seems as if the whole world joins in the celebration. We know very well that all those who celebrate Christmas do not acknowledge God and Jesus in the way He wants, but we must accept that of all the Christian festivals, Christmas is the one which is almost universal!

**The psalm as a blessing** Psalm 67 is most certainly introduced in its 'superscription' as being a song to be sung; 'for the director of music; with stringed instruments; a psalm; a song.' No mention is made of David here, so we do not know the origins of the song or of any event at which it might have been used; it seems to be an entirely general, though universal, song of praise. The first thing to strike us as we read is that the first two lines of the song are remarkably similar to the great priestly blessing pronounced in Numbers 6:24,25. This blessing was given by God to Moses, who required Aaron and his sons (the High Priests of Israel) to use it when blessing the people of Israel:

*'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you His peace.'*

The first two lines are not the same as this, but when you read them, they express the same sentiments, but spoken not by a priest to the people (as in Numbers 6), but by people as if asking for the blessing of God; 'May God be gracious to us ...' (67:1). We may therefore think of this as a song sung by the people of Israel as they came in worship, asking for the blessing of God, the ruler of all the earth; so it is right and proper for God's people even today to follow suit and seek God's blessing and to sing that request in the form of song. At Christmas time, we should remember that the world in which we live is as hard and troublesome as it has ever been, and many people seek the blessing of God at Christmas, whether they are churchgoers or not. The church's privilege is to minister that blessing to the world, as the Old Testament priest Aaron and his sons blessed Israel.

**The pattern of the psalm** Reading through the psalm, we become conscious that it repeats itself. The first verse is about blessing, and so is the last verse; the second verse is about God's work on earth, and so is the sixth verse; the third verse is a refrain of praise, and so is the fifth verse; and right in the middle of the psalm, verse 4 declares the praises of the nations when God rules fairly, and guides the affairs of the world! The position of the breaks 'selah' can fool our eye here, because when you look at the pattern of the verses in this way, it gives a completely different impression of the psalm.

Psalm 67 begins with a call for blessing and ends with a confident cry that 'God will bless'. Blessing is the great promise of God first given to Abraham (Gen 12:3), but blessing is a loose word; what does it mean? The structure of the psalm gives us an answer to this, revealing firstly that God makes Himself known on earth (verses 2 and 6) and brings both 'salvation' (v2) and 'harvest' (v6). These, of course, are the great themes of Christian faith, which celebrates the saving power of God and the coming harvest of the Kingdom of God. What more could a Christian want from a good worship song?

In verses 3 and 5 we find the refrain, which holds the whole psalm together; 'let the peoples praise you, O God ...', and this reminds us that what God does, He does for all people throughout the world. In common with many psalms, Psalm 67 goes well beyond Israel's apparent self-centredness and declares God's universal power and authority. This leads up to the climax of the psalm in the very centre, verse 4. Here, God's rule is celebrated as fair, where the word 'fair' also means 'just' and 'equitable', in fact, everything you would properly want from a government! God's rule is the highest goal of all Creation, and this psalm celebrates this with joy!

**In conclusion** When we read a psalm such as this, we often enjoy the sense of praise it brings, and I can think of a number of worship songs that have come from a song writer's reflections on these words. If we spot its structure, however, we can be blessed by understanding its original focus and purpose, to proclaim as we do at Christmas time, the coming of God into His world to rule in fairness and equity, and for the good of all people. That is, if we will accept Him!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does understanding the structure of the psalm help you to know it better?
2. What is the main theme of the psalm? Discuss what you believe to be the main thrust of the psalm and its possible use.
3. When people come to church at Christmas time, what do you think they are wanting from God or the church?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This psalm is so simple, it is easy to read it and forget that it has a structure, which is designed to focus our eyes on some particular message. The universal appeal of the psalm reminds us of our duty to represent God in the whole world today, and not simply in our own church and world. God's heart is for all creation, and if we are following Him, then we will be led to a place where we too will long for the day when He rules all the earth, and the injustices and misrule of the world will cease. There is so much misrule in our world today, and we read about it as if it was merely a fact of life that people have to endure. It is not; God has a better way and we can either follow Him or become victims of tyrants.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Spend time with this psalm; write it out and keep it by you for a few days. Repeat the Psalm, and let it minister to you and bless you as you read it.
- Pray for all those who seek answers and blessing this Christmas, perhaps coming to church or to carol services not knowing what to expect. Pray that church people will be understanding of all who seek in this way, and treat them with respect.

## Final Prayer

Lift us out of the ordinary, Lord God, and show us the mysteries of heaven, even at a distance, or 'as in a mirror'. Draw us near to You in the mysteries of faith at Christmas time, and give us the gift of new life through the birth of Jesus Christ. Thank You Lord God AMEN