

## Psalm 67 in its literary and ideological context

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### ABSTRACT

*Psalm 67 has been interpreted for a long time as part of an agricultural liturgy of thanksgiving for Yahweh's grace. This paper argues that the psalm's contents, its structure, and its immediate context in the book of Psalms do not justify such an interpretation. It should probably be seen as a call to Yahweh to display and publicly claim his honour, so that all the peoples of the world will recognise Israel's special relationship to him. The strophic structure, poetic features, and ideological intent of the psalm and its neighbours are investigated.*

### A INTRODUCTION

Psalm 67 is a classic example of how the search for a cultic setting of a psalm can lead to a misguided interpretation of its contents. The presence of one phrase in the psalm, the phrase 'Earth has given its increase' in verse 7a, has led Gunkel to see a connection between the psalm and an autumnal feast of thanksgiving for the harvest.<sup>1</sup> Almost all modern commentators and investigators have followed him.<sup>2</sup> This phrase has prompted Gunkel ([1929] 1986:280-281)<sup>3</sup> to

<sup>1</sup> The idea existed long before the time of Gunkel. Wahl (1992:240-241) has traced the idea that it is a hymn of thanksgiving for a harvest to Hitzig's 1863 commentary. According to Wahl, it was taken up from there by Delitzsch, Cheyne, Mowinckel, Gunkel, Schmid, Nötscher, Weiser, Kraus, Staerk, and Deissler. In 1992 he (Wahl 1992:240) described the idea as the 'bis heute dominierende Auslegung'. This is still the case in 2004. Cf the following note.

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is the commentary of Hossfeld & Zenger (2002). In it, Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390) remarks that the psalm's 'Mischcharakter' has given cause to extensive alterations to the text. Otherwise, even the most recent commentaries still show the influence exerted by Gunkel. Terrien (2003:483) still speaks of a 'thanksgiving feast'. Seybold (1996:259) calls it 'ein hymnisches Textstück, das sich an eine Erntedankfestliturgie, speziell an den liturgischen Priestersegen, anhängt und dazu eine Art "Leise" darstellt'. Weiser (1955:322) thinks that the subdued role accorded to the harvest is the result of an abhorrence of Canaanite fertility rites (cf Weiser 1975:473). According to him, thanksgiving for the harvest is overshadowed by gratefulness for Yahweh's presence in the midst of his people. Van der Ploeg (1973:385) also describes the psalm as 'een loflied bij een goede oogst'. Mowinckel (1962:120) saw it as a thanksgiving psalm used at the harvest festival that was a New Year festival at the same time. The blessings of the year was seen as the result of Yahweh's just rule and the psalm could possibly be linked to

change numerous forms in the text so that the psalm would fit the supposed *Sitz-im-Leben*. The first jussive in verse 2a he changed into a perfect ('God has been gracious to us' instead of 'May God be gracious to us'). The second jussive he changed to a *waw* consecutive plus perfect ('and he has blessed us' instead of 'may he bless us'). The hiph'il jussive  $\text{רָאָה}$  in verse 2b, he interpreted as a poetic aorist to justify this interpretation. The jussive  $\text{יְהַלְלֵךְ}$  in verse 7b also had to be read as a 'dichterischer Aorist' or otherwise changed to  $\text{יְהַלְלֵךְ}$  (Gunkel [1929] 1986:281).

Some researchers could not simply ignore the fact that eleven of the fourteen verbs in the psalm are jussives. Since the psalm definitely seems to relate to the future, and since it mentions the increase of the earth, it must be interpreted as a prayer for rain according to Dahood (1966:127).<sup>4</sup> Once again, it seems, one phrase has determined the interpretation of the rest of the psalm. Dahood had a different problem, though: the perfect form  $\text{הִתְחַלֵּף}$  in verse 7a could not be reconciled with a prayer for the future. He solved the problem by interpreting the form as 'a precative perfect' employed as a stylistic surrogate for the jussive or imperative form (Dahood 1966:126).<sup>5</sup>

The proposition of this paper is that the psalm should be interpreted on the basis of a poetic and social-scientific analysis. The presupposition for such an approach is that Psalm 67 was a vehicle of meaningful persuasive discourse and social interaction in its original historical, social, and cultural context.<sup>6</sup>

To be able to determine its meaning in that context, not only its genre, but also its structure and rhetorical strategy have to be investigated. I will try to prove that these features of Psalm 67 indicate that the psalm should be interpreted as a call to Yahweh to display and publicly claim his honour, so that all the peoples of the world will recognise his special relationship to Israel, his

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his enthronement at the New Year festival according to him. Anderson (1985:479) would prefer to interpret the verb  $\text{הִתְחַלֵּף}$  in v 7 as precative perfect, making the psalm a 'national lament or a prayer for God's blessing'. If it does indeed describe a past event, 'then the Psalm must be a harvest thanksgiving' according to him.

<sup>3</sup> Cf also Gunkel-Begriff (1933:315) and the comments of Prinsloo (2000:101).

<sup>4</sup> Dahood (1966:127) comes to this conclusion after making a comparison between the vocabulary and idioms of this psalm and those in Pss 4, 65, and 85. He explains that the psalm 'specifically prays for rain even though this term does not explicitly appear in its eight verses'. Anderson (1985:479) has been influenced by this suggestion of Dahood to interpret the psalm as a 'national lament or a prayer for God's blessing'.

<sup>5</sup> He also interpreted the third jussive in v 2 as a 'precative perfect' to reveal what he calls 'one of the most subtle and sophisticated examples of chiasm' between the three jussives and one precative perfect of v 2 and the one precative perfect and three jussives of vv 7-8 (Dahood 1966:127). See Beyerlin's (1992:6) criticism of this unnecessary 'Anstrengung' by Dahood to get all verbal forms lined up.

<sup>6</sup> Cf the definition of Social-Scientific Criticism given by Elliott (1993:69).

elected client people.<sup>7</sup> Before the text can be interpreted, however, its poetic features have to be explored. Its strophic structure provides the matrix within and through which it communicated and by analysing its poetic form, its rhetorical strategy can be exposed.

## B THE POETIC FEATURES OF PSALM 67

Despite all the suggestions that have been made on form-critical grounds to change the text, Psalm 67 seems to have been well transmitted. In the Septuagint, there are signs of a tradition that the psalm could be linked to David (verse 1). In verse 3, there is a difference between the BHS text and numerous manuscripts that have ‘your ways’ instead of ‘your way’. The BHS text seems to have preserved the more difficult – and thus preferable – reading in this instance. The same applies to the attempt, especially visible in the Peshitta text, to continue in verse 3 the third person references to God found in verse 2. In verse 5, the text of LXX Codex Sinaiticus has one extra colon that forms a parallel with verse 5b: qdxb lbt fpvt. However, this evidence is so isolated that it can be ignored.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, there seems to be no need to change the text in any way, especially not to make it fit into one cultic setting or another.

			.ryvi r/mzôni tnyghBi j Xôhnl ' 1	To the conductor. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.
I	A	1	Wkr'bywl Wnlj yô pyhil gô 2a	May God be gracious to us and bless us;
			.hl s, WnTai wynP; ray; b	may he let his face shine upon us. Selah.
		2	ôKrP' ÂraB: t ['dl ; 3a	So that your way may be known upon the earth,
			.ôt, [Wvyô py/GAI kB] b	among all the nations your salvation.
	B	3	pyhil gô pyMI[ ' ôWd/y 4a	Let the peoples praise you, O God;
			.µL.Ku pyMI[ ' ôWd/y b	let all the peoples praise you!
		4	pyMial j Wnô-ywl Wj mçyl 5a	Let the nations be glad and sing with joy,
			r/vymi pyMI[ ' fPw/tAyKi b	for you judge peoples with equity,
			.hl s, µj ôt' ÂraB: pyMial W c	and you guide the nations upon the earth. Selah.

<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the prayer is neither ‘the conversion of peoples of all lands’, nor an implicit plea for the people of the covenant to be ‘models for the subjects of principalities and empires’ (Terrien 2003:484). It is indeed universalistic (Van der Ploeg 1973:386) and similar to Deutero-Isaiah in theological outlook (Beyerlin 1992:21; Terrien 2003:485), but with the focus on getting all peoples to praise the God of Israel. As Van der Ploeg (1973:386) explains, the idea is that the nations will long for the same blessings that Yahweh has given his elected people. Beyerlin’s form-critical and tradition-critical investigation points towards 400 BC as the time when the psalm was conceived. Wahl (1992:247) comes to a similar conclusion.

<sup>8</sup> The parallel phrase could have been inserted from the LXX of Pss 9:9, 96:13, and 98:9. Cf Van der Ploeg (1973:387) and Van der Lugt (1980:302).

II	C	5	μyhil ʔōμyMi[ʔ ʔWd/y	6a	Let the peoples praise you, O God;
			.μLKu μyMi[ʔ ʔWd/y	b	let all the peoples praise you!
		6	HI Wbyʔhntj: Āra,	7a	Earth has given its increase;
			.Wyhnd ʔōμyhil ʔōWkrʔbyʔ	b	May God, our God, bless us.
		7	μyhil ʔōWkrʔbyʔ	8a	May God bless us
			.ĀraAyspʔAl K; /taoWwaryʔW	b	so that <sup>9</sup> all the ends of the earth will fear him!

The psalm seems to consist of three strophes (A, B, C) that form two stanzas (I, II).<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the heading, which has been assigned to verse 1 in the Masoretic Text, each verse coincides with the boundaries of a verse line: verse 2 = verse line 1, et cetera, so that verse 8 = verse line 7. In the first strophe, there is on average just over nine (Masoretic) syllables per hemistich, in the second strophe exactly eight, and in the third exactly nine.<sup>11</sup> The strophic structure of the poem becomes visible if cognisance is taken of the use the poet has made of figures of speech such as parallelism, chiasmus, repetition, and inclusio.

To begin with the last two of these characteristics, each of the three strophes has the word μyhil a in its first hemistich (v 2a at the beginning, v 4a at the end, and v 6a at the end). It is true that this word also occurs another three times in the last strophe where it does not seem to coincide with the beginning or end of a

<sup>9</sup> Cf the Leidse Vertaling (1912/1994) which translates ‘God zegent ons; opdat alle einden der aarde hem vrezen’.

<sup>10</sup> Valeton (1912:367f), Van der Ploeg (1973:385), and Briggs & Briggs (1925:92-93) are basically in agreement with the demarcation proposed here. Van Uchelen (1977: 182-184) and Wahl (1992:244-245) differ from this only in the separation of v 8 as a separate strophe. Gunkel ([1929] 1986:280), Kraus (1989:41) and De Liagre Böhl & Gemser 1968:111-112) link vv 2-4, 5-6, and 7-8 together. Seybold (1996:259) considers vv 2-3, 4-6, and 7-8 to be the units. This is basically also the proposal by Beyerlin (1992:13). Such a demarcation is based on the idea that v 5 is a ‘Symmetrieachse’ (Beyerlin 1992:13) separating two symmetrically arranged halves. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390-391) and Girard (1994:204) are also convinced of this: vv 2-3, v 4 refrain, v 5 kernel, v 6 refrain, vv 7-8. Verse 5 is expanded with the Greek variant in Zenger’s translation, though (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:391).

<sup>11</sup> If the principles given by Fokkerman (2000:13-17) for counting ‘pre-Masoretic’ syllables are considered, the first strophe might also have exactly nine syllables per hemistich. One does not need to accept everything Fokkerman says, and it is dangerous to change the text in order to obtain the ‘correct’ average, but it is not possible any longer to deny the fact that strophes in Hebrew poetry contain on average 7, 8, or 9 syllables per colon or hemistich.

strophe.<sup>12</sup> But each of the three strophes also contains the word *Āra* in the last verse line of the strophe (in v 3a, v 5c, and v 8b). The words ‘God’ and ‘earth’ therefore seem to *embrace* each strophe. This characteristic seems to have been overlooked by those researchers who extend the second strophe to include verse 6.<sup>13</sup>

Another inclusio is formed by the repetition of the prayer ‘may God bless us’ which occurs in the first and the last verse lines. In both instances, it is followed by a clause expressing the purpose of the wish, which involves the earth (‘May God ... so that ... upon the earth / so that ... the ends of the earth’). This inclusio is strengthened by the sound play created between *W̄hTai ray* in verse line 1 and */tao WarjyW̄* in verse line 7. The inclusio is counterbalanced by the distant parallelism<sup>14</sup> of strophe B with the beginning of strophe C (the fourfold repetition of ‘Let the peoples praise you’). This creates a chiasmus of the type ABBA in the poem as a whole: ‘May God *ble*ss us, may he let his face shine upon us – let the peoples **pr**aise you, let the peoples **pr**aise you – let the peoples **pr**aise you, let the peoples **pr**aise you – may God *ble*ss us, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him’.

Another factor that underscores the segmentation described here is the fact that no close parallel crosses the boundaries of the strophes. There is an internal chiasmic parallel in verse line 1 (‘*God – may he be gracious; may he make to shine - his face*’). Verse line 2 has an internal parallel (‘*upon the earth – your way; among all nations – your salvation*’). There is an internal parallel<sup>15</sup> in verse line 3 (the second hemistich repeats two words of the first). Between verse line 3

<sup>12</sup> According to Van der Ploeg (1973:386), the expression ‘God, our God’ in v 7b proves that this was a ‘Yahwistic’ psalm that was transformed into an ‘Elohistic’ psalm when it became part of the ‘Elohistic’ block of psalms (42-83). The first occurrence of Elohim in the psalm (v 2a) would also have been ‘Yahweh’ originally as comparison with the priestly blessing in Nm 6:24-26 shows (Van der Ploeg 1973:387). Beyerlin (1992:4) considers all the occurrences of *pyhl a to* have been *hwhy* originally.

<sup>13</sup> Cf Prinsloo (2000:106) who sees an inclusio formed in the second strophe by the repetition of the request that the peoples must praise Yahweh. He describes this as a refrain occurring at the beginning and end of the strophe. This is doubtful since a refrain normally occurs at the beginning or end of *different* strophes (cf Wendland 1998:137). Prinsloo (2000:106) cites the support of Crüsemann (1969:186), Van der Lugt (1980:303), Watson (1986:157), and Beyerlin (1992:11). Girard (1994:205), who says that the specialists are unanimous on the concentric ‘architecture’ of the poem, can be added to the list. Terrien (2003:483) recognises three strophes, namely vv 2-4, 5-6, and 7-8. He thus separates the repeated elements as a refrain concluding two of the three strophes. This, however, violates the very close parallel between vv 4 and 5.

<sup>14</sup> Distant parallelism is the correspondence between higher-level units of Hebrew poetic discourse (Wendland 1998:101).

<sup>15</sup> A so-called two-line staircase parallelism. Cf Watson (1986:151 n 106).

and verse line 4 there is an external parallel (*‘let the peoples praise you – let the nations be glad’*). There is also a chiasmic internal parallel between the second and third hemistichs of verse line 4 (*‘you judge the peoples with equity – you guide the nations upon the earth’*).<sup>16</sup> Verse line 5 has the same internal parallelism as verse line 3. Finally, there is an external parallel between verse lines 6 and 7 (*‘may he bless us – God; may he bless us – God’*). Another chiasmus is formed with the interchange<sup>17</sup> between  $\mu y m \lceil$  and  $\mu y m a \lceil$  in verse lines 3 to 5: peoples, peoples, nations, peoples, nations, peoples, peoples, thus: A A B A B A A.

Stanza I				Stanza II		
Strophe A		Strophe B		Strophe C		
Verse line 1	Verse line 2	Verse line 3	Verse line 4	Verse line 5	Verse line 6	Verse line 7
$\mu y h \lceil a$		$\mu y h \lceil a$		$\mu y h \lceil a$	$\mu y h \lceil a (x2)$	$\mu y h \lceil a$
Jrb					Jrb	Jrb
h \lceil s			h \lceil s			
	b (x2)		b			
	Åra		Åra		Åra	Åra
	l k	l k		l k		l k
	$\mu y m g$	$\mu \lceil (x2)$	$\mu \lceil \mu y m a \lceil (x2)$	$\mu \lceil (x2)$		
		hdy (x2)		hdy (x2)		

### Important words and stems that are repeated in Psalm 67

The poet has twice made use of ellipsis to avoid predictability and monotony.<sup>18</sup> Both instances are found at the end of a strophe: in verse 3b  $t \lceil d \lceil$  is omitted, while in verse 5c, the causal particle  $y k$  needs to be inserted by the reader or listener. The use of ballast variant, extension of one element of a second hemistich to compensate for the absence of one element of the first hemistich, to which it forms a parallel, is a constant feature of the poem. It occurs in verse line 1 (the absence of a second verb is compensated for by the use of a preposition); verse line 2 (ellipsis of the verb is compensated for by extending ‘upon the earth’ to ‘among all the nations’); verse lines 3 and 5 (absence of the vocative ‘God’ is compensated for by inserting ‘all of them’); and verse line 4 (‘with

<sup>16</sup> The parallel is strengthened by the use of adverbial qualifications in both hemistichs (Prinsloo 2000:107).

<sup>17</sup> The use of two alike-sounding synonyms such as  $\mu y m \lceil$  and  $\mu y m a \lceil$  here are described as paronomasia by Prinsloo (2000:106). It could simply be a case of variation.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Wendland (1998:65) on the possible functions of ellipsis.

equity' is balanced by 'upon the earth').<sup>19</sup> It is notable that in four of the verse lines, the 'ballast' is constructed with the help of the noun 'all'. This gives a unique flavour to the psalm as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the psalm's text is indeed that of repetition. The wish or prayer that Yahweh will bless them is expressed at the beginning of the psalm and reiterated at its end. In the middle, the prayer that Yahweh must cause the nations to praise him is repeated no less than five times: 'Let the peoples praise you, let all the peoples praise you; let the nations be glad and sing with joy, let the peoples praise you, let all the peoples praise you'. The variation in the middle section causes a kind of chiasmus in the repetition of these phrases. Especially the repetition of 'all' and words for 'peoples' and 'nations' underscores the purpose of this reiteration: it is a kind of hyperbole that serves to emphasise the strong longing the poet has that *all* nations will recognise Yahweh as the most powerful and benevolent God in the world. For that reason he prays that Yahweh's salvation will be known 'among *all* the nations' (v 3b), that '*all* the peoples' will praise him (v 4b and v 6b), and that '*all* the ends of the earth' will fear him (v 8b). Prinsloo (2000:105) sees instances of hendiadys in the phrase  $\text{Wnk} \text{r} \text{b} \text{y} \text{w} \text{l} \text{W} \text{n} \text{g} \text{y} \text{d}$  (v 2a) and the phrase  $\text{W} \text{n} \text{w} \text{y} \text{w} \text{l} \text{W} \text{j} \text{m} \text{c} \text{j} \text{l}$  (in v 5a). The function of hendiadys in these instances would be to emphasise the benevolence of God and the extent of the required response from the nations for his goodness.

This analysis has shown that the phrase in verse 7a, 'earth has given its increase', does not play such an important role as to determine the structure or interpretation of the psalm.<sup>21</sup> It is involved in a morphological chiasmus ('*earth* has given ... may he bless, *God*'). Some investigators have interpreted the jussive in verse 7b ('May God bless us') as a defective imperfect consecutive ('and he has blessed us').<sup>22</sup> This would then constitute a semantic parallel between the two cola as well. The word 'earth' is repeated at the end of verse 7b and this has been used as an argument to demarcate verses 7 and 8 as a separate strophe (Prinsloo 2000:108). It should be noted, however, that 'earth' in verse 8b refers to the peoples who inhabit the earth rather than the earth as such or as an agricultural entity.

<sup>19</sup> Cf also Prinsloo (2000:107). He sees an instance of ballast variant also in vv 7a and 8b, which may be going too far.

<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps significant that  $\text{Wnk}$  serves in many exilic and post-exilic biblical texts as a description of the totality of creation made by Yahweh, ruled by him, belonging to him, and being under the obligation to serve him. Cf Gerleman (1971:830).

<sup>21</sup> As Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390) remarks: 'Das Thema Fruchtbarkeit der Erde bzw. Ernte in <sup>7a</sup> ist deshalb nicht das Hauptthema ...' Wahl (1992:242) similarly remarks that this 'Segensnotiz im Indikativ' cannot be used as a key to the interpretation of the whole psalm. He (Wahl 1992:243) describes the psalm as 'ein eschatologisches Bitt- und Loblied'.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Van der Ploeg (1973:388): 'in poëzie kan een imperf. zonder waw cons. volgend op een perfectum de verlede tijd betekenen'.

### C THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PSALM 67

At least two different social groups are discernible in Psalm 67. There is an 'in-group' which is referred to five times as 'us' (in objective suffixes: 'be gracious to us', 'bless us', 'let his face shine upon us', 'bless us', and 'bless us') and once referred to as 'our' in the form of a possessive pronominal suffix ('our God'). Then there is also an 'out-group' referred to as 'all the nations', 'the peoples', 'all the peoples', 'the nations', 'peoples', 'the nations upon the earth', 'the peoples', 'all the peoples', and 'all the ends of the earth'. This last reference, as well as the parallel of the first verse line, shows that the first reference to earth in the phrase 'so that your way may be known upon the earth' (v 3a) should be included as a reference to the out-group. What differentiates the in-group from the out-group, it seems, is the knowledge that the in-group has of God's way (his Torah, v 3a)<sup>23</sup> and his 'salvation' (his intervention on behalf of Israel, v 3b).<sup>24</sup> The members of the out-group at present do not praise God, his actions do not give them cause for joy and singing, and not all of them fear him. The reason why they should praise God and sing with exuberant joy, or why they will do so in future, is because God judges (or will judge) them with equity and guides all nations upon the earth. If God blesses the in-group in the way they request him to, the result will also be that all the ends of the earth will fear him (v 8b).

The in-group seems to be a community of believers in Israel or Judah or Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> The psalm is a prayer in the form of a song that was accompanied by stringed musical instruments (v 1). There are definite cultic overtones, as the use of key-words from the Aaronite blessing formula in verse 2 and the (antiphonal?) refrain shows. The cultic community calls upon God to honour his covenantal responsibility towards them so that his honour on earth would be extended to all nations. The situation that faces the community is not described as particularly bleak. Verse 7a provides evidence that it could perhaps even be described as positive. Yet, there is a desire for improvement, since God is asked for grace and blessing. Since the people's honour is directly related to the honour of God in the

<sup>23</sup> Usually the plural 'his ways' is used with reference to Yahweh's laws (cf, e.g., Dt 8:6; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; Ps 119:3; etc). 'His way' probably refers to his requirements for human life in general.

<sup>24</sup> In Ps 106:8, for instance, the stems [vy and [dy are combined in the sense that Yahweh saved the Israelites in the wilderness for his name's sake and to make his power known to the nations. Wahl (1992:246) considers the blessings mentioned in vv 2-3 to be the salvation referred to. He refers to the eschatological use of [vy in Is 12:2-3; 26:1-3; 45:22-25; and Jr 33:8-9 as parallel to that in Ps 67. However, the immediate surroundings of Ps 67 (e.g. Ps 66:6 and Ps 68:8, 13-15) suggest that the exodus, the sojourn in the wilderness, and the conquest of the land of Israel were uppermost in the mind of the editors.

<sup>25</sup> Millard (1994:123) thinks that Pss 65-68 were brought together as a compositional cluster 'in einer Diasporasituation'. His view does not clash necessarily with the idea that this particular psalm was used in Jerusalem.



eyes of the world, it can be inferred that their national honour is in a state of diminishment.

The most important social values that are involved between the *dramatis personae* in the psalm are the patron-client relationship between God and his people, and the honour of God and that of his people. The verb *חן* in the wish ‘may God be gracious to us’ is typical of the relationship between a patron and a client. Grace was something received by a client either on terms more advantageous than those that could be obtained from anyone else or which could not be obtained from anyone else at all (Malina 1998:153). Earthly and heavenly patrons provided favours and help in exchange for praise, support, and loyalty. On the other hand, Israel’s claim to honour was its special relationship to God, the evidence that he was on their side (Plevnik 1998:108). This claim depended on evidence for God’s continued interest in his client people. However, Israel’s honour in the international arena could be maintained only if the honour of God was recognised by the international community. A national calamity would be proof that God had abandoned and thus shamed his people (Plevnik 1998:108). If the situation of their dishonour continued, it might seem that their God was not unwilling, but rather unable to save them. In that case, *his* honour was also tarnished. It seems that this was the social situation that prompted the prayer in Psalm 67. God had to see to it that the peoples around Israel or Judah acknowledge his honour (vv 3, 4, 6, and 8). The way to do this was also spelt out: it would happen if God would show grace to them and bless them (vv 2-3 and v 8). It would happen if (and when) God’s equitable judgement and his guidance of all nations upon the earth became evident to everyone. The result would be more than a simple recognition of God’s honour by the nations; it would entail inclusion of all the peoples of the world in a covenant with Yahweh.<sup>26</sup>

The meaning of certain expressions in Psalm 67 becomes clearer when compared to other texts. In verse 3a, the expression ‘so that your way may be known upon the earth’ is clarified by comparison with Psalm 86:11: ‘Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name’ (NIB). The result of God’s showing grace to his people will be that other nations will acknowledge him as God. God’s ‘salvation’ will become known among all the nations (v 3b). This contains an allusion to the exodus,<sup>27</sup> for in Psalm 106:8 it is said that Yahweh ‘saved’ the forefathers of the

<sup>26</sup> This is not spelt out explicitly, but the description of the peoples’ being glad and singing with joy in v 5a implies inclusion in a covenant. Public rites such as showing joy and singing were a medium through which the state of covenant relations was effectively communicated. Cf Olyan (1996:208). This should also be compared to Ps 65:2-3 and Ps 66:1-4.

<sup>27</sup> If the literary context of Ps 67 is relevant in any way, the references to the exodus in Ps 66:5-7 and Ps 68:8-9 should prove that this is what is referred to. Ps 68:12-15, however, seems to refer also to the period of the judges. Compare these verses with Jdg 5:16 and 9:48.

Israelites ‘for his name’s sake’ and ‘to make his mighty power known’. These texts indicate that God’s ‘way’ and his ‘salvation’ indirectly refer to his honour and that of his people respectively.

The request ‘let the nations be glad and sing with joy’ found in verse 5a can be compared to Psalm 5:12: ‘But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.’ This indicates that the community of believers are not concerned for their honour and that of their God in a selfish way, but that there is a genuine desire that the nations will also become clients and worshippers of their God.<sup>28</sup> Verse 5bc in turn has similarities with Psalm 143:10 ‘Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground’ (NIB). The last three words of this verse in Hebrew are *r/vym* *Árab* *ynj nt*. The similarity is conspicuous, since Psalm 67:5 speaks of God’s judging the peoples *r/vym* and guiding (*hjn*) the nations upon the earth (*Árab*). The language used in Psalm 67 with regard to the peoples thus approaches that used by a Yahweh-worshipper for himself.<sup>29</sup>

The only phrase in Psalm 67 that has not been discussed so far in this investigation, is verse 7a: ‘Earth has given its increase’. As was noted at the beginning, this has been accepted from early in the history of the psalm’s interpretation to refer to the blessings springing from the soil, for God’s blessing on the harvest. Leviticus 26:4 contains the same three words, but in a phrase referring to the future: ‘The land (of Israel) will give its produce’. The same sense is present in Leviticus 26:20, Deuteronomy 11:17, Psalm 85:13, Ezekiel 34:27, Haggai 1:10, and Zechariah 8:12. What has sometimes escaped notice, however, is the connection between the land giving its produce and Israel’s keeping of the covenant. Leviticus 26:3-4, for instance, stipulate the prerequisites: ‘If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit.’ The concept is ‘primarily associated with the blessings and cursings of Yahweh’.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of Psalm 67, therefore, this phrase apparently does not declare primarily that the harvest was gathered in, but that nature is a witness to the fact that Yahweh has indeed blessed his people and his land in response to their

<sup>28</sup> Anderson (1985:480) is of the same opinion.

<sup>29</sup> Cf also Ps 23:3; 31:4; 61:3; 73:24 and Van der Ploeg (1973:387).

<sup>30</sup> Cf Harris, Archer & Waltke (1980: *s v* ‘yebûl’): ‘In the Mosaic covenant, the land is blessed or cursed in response to Israel’s obedience or disobedience to the covenant (Lev 26:4, 20; Deut 11:17; Deut 32:22), though ultimately she will receive the blessings of the land in the millennium (Ezek 34:27; Zech 8:12). Judgment is often manifested through the destruction of a nation’s produce by Yahweh or by another nation (Jud 6:4; Psa 78:46; Hag 1:10). Figuratively, even the production of one’s house may depart during judgment (Job 20:28).’

compliance with the stipulations of the covenant.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of this evidence that God is satisfied with their devotion to him, the community prays that God will bless them even more so that all the world will come to acknowledge his saving power (his salvation). They ask that all the world will know his requirements for worship (his way) and will gladly join in with reverence, praise, and respect (fear) for him alone. In this way, all the inhabitants of the earth will become partners in a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel.

#### D THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF PSALM 67

The importance of a psalm's literary context in interpreting it is recognised more and more. Psalm 67 is flanked by two psalms that display a similar ideology and some of the same themes as were identified in this paper. Psalm 65 may be even closer to Psalm 67 than its immediate neighbours may.<sup>32</sup> Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390) sees an intelligent arrangement in the series formed by Psalms 65, 66, 67, and 68. The first three of these he describes as a liturgical progress of hymn, thanksgiving song, and prayer for blessing, a development that culminates in Psalm 68 as a theophany of Yahweh before the forum of nations.<sup>33</sup>

Five verses of Psalm 65 describe the agricultural blessings that God has given to the land (vv 10-14). But the psalm also praises God's creative and redemptive acts and the respect it engendered in 'those living far away' (Ps 65:9, using *ary* like Ps 67:8, but *hxq* instead of *spa* as in Ps 67:8). God's saving acts (Ps 65:6) and the songs of joy (*איר*) of those living in the far east and the far west (Ps 65:9) are also mentioned (compare this to *איר* in Ps 67:5). Psalm 65 and Psalm 67 thus share the theme of God's blessings on his people, his redemption of his people, and a universalistic perspective according to which all people will acknowledge his power and honour.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> As Weiser (1975:474) remarks, 'the blessing of the harvest from the earth is no longer a cultic end in itself, as it is in the fertility-rites of the natural religion; it is ... the guarantee of the grace of God'. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390) is willing to declare that the poet plays with two possible meanings of 'earth': The produce of the land/earth is a sign that the earth is subject to a cosmic order, and this order corresponds with the political-social order, which the psalm sees as God's blessing to Israel and all the peoples of the world.

<sup>32</sup> Crüsemann (1969:199) denies that these two psalms have the same *Gattung*: 'Ps 65 ist eindeutig ein Hymnus und Ps 67 ist am besten als "Segenspsalm" zu bezeichnen'.

<sup>33</sup> Millard (1994:121-123) similarly describes Ps 65 as a hymn; Ps 66 as a psalm of thanksgiving; Ps 67 as a psalm of blessing and thanksgiving; and Ps 68 as a theophany that were brought together to form a 'Hymnus-Danklied-Gruppe'.

<sup>34</sup> Cf Ps 65:3 – 'to you all flesh will come'; Ps 65:6 – 'God, our salvation and the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas'. Compare this to Ps 67:3 – 'So

Psalms 66 and 67 also share the theme of *universal worship and dedication* to God. The whole earth is called in Psalm 66:1-2 to shout with joy to God and sing the glory of his name; while in Psalm 67:5 God is asked to let the nations be glad and sing with joy. In Psalm 66:4 it is said that all the earth *bows down to God and sings praise* to him, while in Psalm 67:8 the people of Yahweh *asks* him to bless them *so that all the ends of the earth will fear him*. In Psalm 66:5 the nations are invited to come and *see* what God has done,<sup>35</sup> while in Psalm 67:3 God is asked to bless his people so that his way and his salvation may be *known* among all the nations. His saving acts at the Sea of Reeds caused rejoicing (j mc) among his people (Ps 66:6); in Psalm 67:5 it is the nations who should rejoice (j mc). The peoples themselves are *ordered* in Psalm 66:8 to praise the God of the Israelites; while God is asked to *let the peoples praise him* in Psalm 67:4 and 6. Psalm 66:7 describes God as one whose eyes *watch* the nations so that the rebellious do not exalt themselves, while Psalm 67:5 says that he *judges* and *guides* the nations upon the earth. Finally, the abundant blessing of Yahweh is also mentioned in Psalm 66:12: ‘You let men ride over our heads, we went through fire and water, but you brought us to (a place of) abundance (hywr)’.

There is a different approach to the international community in Psalm 68: Psalm 67 asks that God will bless his people so that all the world will come to *worship* him, while Psalm 68:1 simply asks that all God’s *enemies* be *scattered*.<sup>36</sup> In Psalm 68, it is not the *nations* who should be glad and sing with joy as Psalms 65 and 67 request, but the *righteous* (Ps 68:4). Yet, the kingdoms of the earth are called to *sing* to God towards the end of Psalm 68 (in v 33). This provides a parallel with both Psalms 66 and 67. Psalms 67 and 68 also share the theme of God’s *salvation*. Psalm 68 does not, however, request that knowledge of Yahweh’s salvation be increased; it simply states that Israel’s God is a God who saves (Ps 68:21). Finally, while it is the *earth* that has given its increase according to Psalm 67; it is the *nations* who will bring gifts to God in Jerusalem according to Psalm 68:19 and 30. The same stem (l by) is used for the words ‘increase’ in Psalm 67:7 and ‘gifts’ in Psalm 68:30. It seems possible, therefore, that the phrase ‘Earth has given its increase’ in Psalm 67 could be understood as a parallel to the nations of the world’s recognition of the honour of Israel’s God. ‘Earth’ in Psalm 67:7 is not simply the agricultural potential of the land Israel, but also a symbol of the willingness of the peoples of the world to recognise the honour of Yahweh. The phrase ‘earth has given its increase’ thus signifies the fidelity of the God who blesses his client-people by providing fertility to their

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that your way may be known upon the earth, among all the nations your salvation’ and Ps 67:8b – ‘so that all the ends of the earth will fear him’.

<sup>35</sup> A reference to Yahweh’s saving Israel at the Sea of Reeds during the exodus.

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 68 is conspicuous in its negative view of the enemies of Yahweh: Vv 22-23 say: ‘The Lord says, “I will bring them from Bashan; I will bring them from the depths of the sea, that you may plunge your feet in the blood of your foes, while the tongues of your dogs have their share.”’

land,<sup>37</sup> but also by granting them honour and recognition in the community of nations.<sup>38</sup>

## E CONCLUSION

It seems that the focus of Psalm 67 is on the relationship between Israel and Yahweh and, because of that relationship, also the relationship between Yahweh and the other nations. The cultic community is not primarily gathered to thank God for the harvest that has been gathered in. They are also not praying for his blessings in the form of rain, either. They are asking Yahweh to proclaim his honour to all the nations. The whole world should become aware of his saving power and his 'way' which the Israelites have come to know first-hand. They should take notice of the fact that it is their God who guides all the nations on earth and who judges them with equity. They should join in by praising Yahweh and by joyfully taking part in a cultic display of their reverence and praise for him. All of this will happen when Yahweh blesses his people even more.<sup>39</sup> Since Yahweh is the greatest of all gods, the only true God who judges and guides the nations of the world and who has chosen Israel to display his honour to the entire world, it is time for him to proclaim his honour and vindicate his people in the eyes of all the nations.<sup>40</sup> While this appeal is being made to God, the community is simultaneously provided with a means to rally under its post-exilic ideology and confession that Yahweh is the supreme God who controls the destiny of all the nations of the world.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf also Terrien (2003:485).

<sup>38</sup> Cf also Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2002:390).

<sup>39</sup> As Seybold (1996:259) says, the core of the psalm is the idea that blessing as the gift of God that is visible to the entire world would guide the peoples to acknowledgement and worship of Yahweh.

<sup>40</sup> Despite the universalistic overtones, all the other psalms in the cluster 65-68 give evidence of the fact that there exists also enmity between God's people and the other nations.

<sup>41</sup> Beyerlin (1992:22) notes the function of the psalm to define the self-understanding of the congregation of Yahweh.

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