

Psalm 85

Superscript: To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

This psalm is thought to have been composed after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; and yet when they were again in distress from their neighbors, maybe in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Syriac version says, "it is a prophecy concerning Christ" especially because of the verses 2-3:

Psalm 85:1-3 - "LORD, thou hast been favorable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger."

Take a moment to meditate on this declaration!

This psalm connects with the readings in **Leviticus 21-22** because forgiveness is accomplished by our High Priest, Christ, and his sacrifice. The Leviticus chapters concern qualifications for holiness of the priests and point to the perfect accomplishment of His priestly duties.

Although the forgiveness has been accomplished on the cross once for all, we are still required to walk in repentance daily. Here, Israel is in trouble again through their own lack of zeal, and they are experiencing God's chastisement. So the psalmist cries out for God to "turn us"...

Psalm 85:4-6 - "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?"

"revive" = *chayah* - live, be alive, restore to life, revive

"again" = *shub* - turn, repent, return again

The meaning is for God to cause us to repent.

- **Lamentations 5:21** - "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

- **Psalm 80:19** - "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

Psalm 85:7 - "Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation."

Psalm 85:8 - I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

"folly" - "to doubt and question the providence of God," according to Spanish rabbi Isaac ben Moses Arama (c. 1420 – 1494)

The psalmist pauses to listen expectantly for God's response, and to keep watch for His mercy. This involves waiting:

- **Isaiah 40:31** - "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

- **Habakkuk 2:1** - "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

"saints" = *chaciyd* - pious ones, holy ones (Hassidim)

This also links the psalm to the **Leviticus 21-22** readings, referring to Moses blessing the tribe of Levi.

- **Deuteronomy 33:8-11** - "And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy (*chaciyd*) one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him (after the golden calf Exodus 32:25-29); neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins (strength) of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

- **Psalm 132:16** - "I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints (*chaciyd*) shall shout aloud for joy."

Psalm 85:9 - "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."

- **Hosea 3:4-5** - "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."

Glory = Christ or the Shekinah Glory of His Spirit

- **Hebrews 1:3** - "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself

purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"

Psalm 85:10 - "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

"Mercy and truth" is restated in the New testament as "grace and truth."

- **John 1:14** - "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Sin makes peace a stranger to our lives. The "kiss" of the meeting of righteousness and peace reflects the peace of mind and settled confidence that results from Christ's righteousness covering our sin. It is the joy of reconciliation, like between long separated lovers, or even the kiss of the Father running to meet his prodigal son.

- **Romans 5:1-2** - "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Psalm 85:11 - "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

From Midrash Rabbah on Genesis 8:5:

"Rabbi Simon said, "At the moment the Holy One chose to create the first Adam the ministering angels broke up into factions. Some of them said, "Create him;" while others said, "Don't do it." Thus it is written: "Lovingkindness and truth will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss." (**Psalm 85:10**)

Lovingkindness said: Create him, for he will do acts of lovingkindness.

Truth said: Don't create him, for he is drenched in lies.

Righteousness said: Create him, for he will do much Tzedaka.

Peace said: Don't do it, for he is essentially quarrelsome.

What did the Holy One do? He took Truth and cast it toward the earth.

Thus it is written, ;"And truth will be cast to the earth.;" (**Daniel 8:12**)

The ministering angels said: Sovereign of the Universe, why do You shame the leader of Your court? Let truth rise from the earth. Thus it is written, "Truth will arise from the earth." (**Psalm 85:11**)

Another version of this same story says that the angel of transcendental truth advised God not to create man. God threw the angel down to earth, where it shattered and must

now grow out of the earth in splintered, contingent shards. Our understanding of truth comes when we experience this "kiss" of the meeting of righteousness and peace.

From the fallen and broken lives of God's people, the splintered letters of God's Name come to light, if we have eyes to see. Ultimately, that Truth sprang forth, whole and complete, in Jesus.

- **Psalm 139:15-16** - "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

Psalm 85:12 - "Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase."

- **Ezekiel 34:27** - "And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them."

Psalm 85:13 - "Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps."

Targum: "In the good way..."

Righteousness - means a righteous *person*, according to Aben Ezra. Christ Himself, or possibly John the Baptist.

Rashi - And the Holy One, blessed be He, will place the righteousness in the ways of his steps, with which he leads his sons.