

PSALMS

Chapter 68

God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him! ² As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God! ³ But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy! ⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him! ⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. ⁶ God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land. ⁷ O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, *Selah* ⁸ the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. ⁹ Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad; you restored your inheritance as it languished; ¹⁰ your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy. ¹¹ The Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host: ¹² “The kings of the armies—they flee, they flee!” The women at home divide the spoil—¹³ though you men lie among the sheepfolds—the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold. ¹⁴ When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalmon. ¹⁵ O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan! ¹⁶ Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, where the LORD will dwell forever? ¹⁷ The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary. ¹⁸ You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there. ¹⁹ Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. *Selah* ²⁰ Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death. ²¹ But God will strike the heads of his enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways. ²² The Lord said, “I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea, ²³ that you may strike your feet in their blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from the foe.” ²⁴ Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—²⁵ the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines: ²⁶ “Bless God in the great congregation, the LORD, O you who are of Israel’s fountain!” ²⁷ There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali. ²⁸ Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us. ²⁹ Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you. ³⁰ Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples who delight in war. ³¹ Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God. ³² O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, *Selah* ³³ to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. ³⁴ Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. ³⁵ Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

Ps 68 A processional liturgy celebrating the glorious and triumphant rule of Israel’s God. Verses 1–18 contain many clear references to God’s triumphal march from Mount Sinai (in the days of Moses) to Mount Zion (in the days of David). The events at Mount Sinai marked the birth of the kingdom of God among his people; the establishing of the ark of the covenant, symbol of God’s

throne, in Jerusalem marked the establishment of God's redemptive kingdom in the earth, with Jerusalem as its royal city. The early church, taking its cue from Eph 4:8–13, understood this psalm to foreshadow the resurrection, ascension and present rule of Christ and the final triumph of his church over the hostile world. Ps 68 is the last in a series of four (see introduction to Ps 65). (CSB)

The psalm is composed of nine stanzas (vv. 19–20 should probably be joined with vv. 21–23), with a concluding doxology. The first stanza indicates the beginning of the liturgical procession, and the last refers to its conclusion—God enthroned in his sanctuary. The seventh (vv. 24–27) speaks expressly of the procession coming into view and entering the sanctuary. In light of these clear references, the third stanza (vv. 7–10) suggests a stage in the procession recalling the desert journey from Sinai to the promised land, while the fifth (vv. 15–18) marks that stage in which the Lord ascends Mount Zion. On the other hand, the second stanza (vv. 4–6) reflects on the benevolence of God's rule; the fourth (vv. 11–14) recalls his victories over the kings of Canaan; the sixth (vv. 19–23) speaks reassuringly of God's future victories; and the eighth (vv. 28–31) contains prayers that God may muster his power to subdue the enemy as he had done before. (CSB)

Psalm seems to be an “order of service” for a procession at the Jerusalem temple (or at the tabernacle). Parts of the psalm use imagery similar to that used by the Canaanites when describing their god Baal, which is ironic because the psalm describes the defeat of Canaanite kings. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–6, the Lord has brought salvation to Israel in the exodus; vv 7–10, wilderness wanderings; vv 11–14, conquest of the Promised Land; vv 15–18; dwelling in God's sanctuary; vv 19–23, God dispenses forgiveness and salvation for all who trust in Him; vv 24–27, God is worthy of praise at His sanctuary; vv 28–31, all the nations praise God; vv 32–35, God empowers Israel. (TLSB)

68:1–3 The start of the procession, liturgically recalling the beginning of God's march with his people in army formation from Sinai (see Nu 10:33–35). (CSB)

It is apparent that David is looking to the past for comfort in the present and in the future, since the opening verses are very similar to the prayer which is recited whenever the people of Israel marched out of their camp in the wilderness with the ark of God leading the way. (PBC)

68:1 *shall arise* – God acts on behalf of His people (12:5). (TLSB)

enemies shall be scattered. Any (human or demonic) who reject Him by unbelief. (TLSB)

With the many enemies the people of God face today – atheistic Communism, militant Islam, human and materialism, false teacher within the church – it often seems that the church is fighting a losing battle. But we can be confident of final victory as David was. (PBC)

68:3 *righteous.* Israel as the committed people of God in distinction from those opposed to the coming of God's kingdom (the “wicked” of v. 2). (CSB)

68:4–6 A call to praise God for the benevolence of his rule. (CSB)

68:4 *name.* God's name reveals His very being and identity (Ex 3:13–15). (TLSB)

who rides through the desert. † An epithet of Baal found in Canaanite literature. Here the point is that the Lord (Yahweh, not Baal) is the exalted One who truly makes the storm cloud his chariot (see v. 33; 18:9; 104:3; Isa 19:1; Mt 26:64). (CSB)

Alludes to the Lord leading Israel out of Egypt at the time of the exodus. (TLSB)

What a contrast between the disaster experienced by God's enemies and the blessings enjoyed by his children! Although he is a mighty God, whose rule over nature is pictured by his riding on the clouds, he is a gentle father to his children. (PBC)

68:5–6 God is the defender of the powerless (see 10:14; 146:7–9; 147:6; Dt 10:18). (CSB)

God has a special concern for the physically weak, for the oppressed and for widows and orphans. These terms refer not only to earthly circumstances, but also to the spiritual plight of Israel and the church in the world. (PBC)

68:6 Another way of saying that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1Pt 5:5). (TLSB)

sets the solitary in a home.. See Ex 1:21; Ru 4:14–17; 1Sa 2:5. (CSB)

leads out the prisoners. As he led Israel out of Egypt (see 69:33; 107:10, 14). (CSB)

Sometimes the prisons of God's people are literal prisons, like the slave camps of Egypt or the prison of Herod. Sometimes they are the prisons of sin or oppression. God sets his people free from all such through the message of the gospel of forgiveness and through the deliverance from physical distress which he brings to his people. (PBC)

sun-scorched land. A place utterly barren, lacking even soil for vegetation (see Eze 26:4, 14). (CSB)

68:7–10 Recollection of God's march through the desert from Sinai into the promised land (see Jdg 5:4–5; Hab 3:3–6). (CSB)

The providence of God as he led his people through the wilderness and into their inheritance is the model for the way in which God provides for his people through all time. (PBC)

68:7 Recalls that the Lord led Israel through the wilderness in safety and salvation. (TLSB)

selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

68:8 *earth quaked*. A reference to the quaking of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18). (CSB)

May refer to God's giving of His covenant to Israel at Sinai (Ex 19:16). (TLSB)

heavens poured down rain. The Pentateuch preserves no tradition of rain during the desert wanderings, but here (and in Jdg 5:4) rain is closely associated with the quaking of the earth as a manifestation of the majesty of God. Perhaps the "thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud" over Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16) were accompanied by rain. But see also v. 9, which suggests rains that refreshed the people on their journey. (CSB)

68:9-10 The Lord provided for Israel during the wilderness wanderings (Ex 16-17; Nu 11). (TLSB)

68:9 *your inheritance*. The people of Israel (see Dt 9:29). (CSB)

it. Probably refers to the promised land. (CSB)

abundance. Lit. "goodness." (CSB)

shed abroad. From the produce of Canaan (see Jos 5:11-12). (CSB)

68:11-14 Recollection of God's victories over the kings of Canaan. (CSB)

These verses describe the victories over their enemies which God gave his people through the judges. They are loosely based on the song sung by Deborah after her victory over the army of Sisera (Judges 5). (PBC)

68:11-13 With v 14, refers to the Lord leading Israel in the conquest of the Promised Land. The women announce the happy events and divide the spoil (v 13). (TLSB)

68:11 *announced the news*. God declared beforehand that he would be victorious over the Canaanite kings (see Ex 23:22-23, 27-28, 31; Dt 7:10-24; 11:23-25; Jos 1:2-6). (CSB)

68:13 *sleep among the campfires*. Rest in camp (see Jdg 5:16). (CSB)

This is apparently a rebuke to the negligent and weak in faith who stayed home and did not participate in the battle against the Lord's enemies. (PBC)

wings of a dove...silver...gold. Israel, God's "dove" (see 74:19 and note; cf. Hos 7:11), is enriched with the silver and gold of plunder from the kings of Canaan even though she still remains in camp. This poetic hyperbole (a figure of speech that uses exaggeration for emphasis) celebrates the fact that God had defeated the kings even before Israel met them in battle (see Jos 2:8-11; 5:1; 6:16; see also 2Sa 5:24; 2Ki 7:5-7; 19:35; 2Ch 20:22-30). (CSB)

68:14 *snow fall on Zalmon*. Zalmon was a mountain near Shechem (see Jdg 9:46-48), but others identify it here as Jebel Druze, a dark volcanic mountain east of Bashan. Its name appears to mean "the dark one"—in distinction from the Lebanon ("the white one") range, composed of limestone—and the figure may involve the contrast of white snow scattered on "Dark Mountain." The reference may then be to abandoned weapons littering the field from which the kings have fled headlong (see 2Ki 7:15). (CSB)

Figurative for sun-bleached bones or glittering equipment of slain enemies lying on the darker hillsides. (TLSB)

68:15–18 Celebration of God’s ascent to Mount Zion. (CSB)

68:15–16 The mountains surrounding Bashan, including the towering Mount Hermon, are portrayed as being jealous because God has chosen Mount Zion as the seat of his rule, making it the “highest” of mountains. (CSB)

This region east and north of the Sea of Chinnereth was home to impressive Mount Hermon, more than 9,000 ft above sea level. Zion, though much lower in height, is more significant. In the services there, God made Himself present to forgive. (TLSB)

68:17 *chariots of God*. God’s great heavenly host, here likened to a vast chariot force (see 2Ki 6:17; Hab 3:8, 15). In the time of the Roman Empire Jesus referred to God’s host in terms of “legions” (Mt 26:53). (CSB)

Sinai – The divine majesty displayed in giving the Law at Sinai is now on display in forgiveness at the tabernacle, which points to God’s forgiveness in Christ (Jn 2:19–22). (TLSB)

68:18 *ascended on high*. Went up to your place of enthronement on Mount Zion. (CSB)

leading a host of captives ... receiving gifts. Like a victorious king after triumphs on the field of battle. (CSB)

Tabernacle points to the risen and ascended Christ. “Christ has overcome the devil, and has given to us the promise and the Holy Spirit, in order that—by divine aid—we ourselves may also overcome” (Ap V 18). (TLSB)

rebellious. Those who had opposed the kingdom of God are compelled to submit to him and bring tribute. (CSB)

God ... may dwell there. Grammatically completes the clause, “When you ascended on high.” Paul applies this verse (as translated in the Septuagint) to the ascended Christ (Eph 4:8–13), thereby implying that Christ’s ascension was a continuation of, and a fulfillment of, God’s establishment of his kingdom in his royal city Jerusalem (see introduction). (CSB)

By the faithful use of these gifts we bring people into God’s kingdom of grace so that God dwells in their hearts through faith. (PBC)

68:19–23 Joyous confession of hope that God’s victorious campaigns will continue until the salvation of his people is complete. (CSB)

The God revealed at the OT tabernacle brings salvation to those who trust in Him and judgment to those who oppose Him. (TLSB)

This section includes devastating defeat God inflicts on the enemies of his people, such as the destruction of Sisera’s army, but it points especially to the eternal judgments of hell. (PBC)

68:19 *bears us up*. Releases us from bearing the burdens that enslavement to our enemies would impose on us (see 81:6; Isa 9:4; 10:27). But some associate this line with such passages as 55:22; Isa 46:4. (CSB)

This beautiful little prayer summarizes all that God does for us. (PBC)

He who is so mighty stoops so far down as to “bear our burdens” and thus he well merits the description “God who saves.” (Leupold)

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68:20 *deliverances from death*. At the hand of our enemies—implicitly, perhaps, also from death itself as the last great enemy. (CSB)

68:21 As God assures the life of his people (see v. 20), so he will crush those who oppose him. (CSB)

strikes the heads. See Nu 24:17. (CSB)

hairy crowns – Cf Dt 32:42. Enemy soldiers may have taken an oath not to cut their hair until they had victory. (TLSB)

This is an image of youthful vigor and pride (as with Samson and Absalom). These enemies of God show no signs of letting up in their antagonism to him. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

68:22 *them*. The enemies who fled at the victorious onward march of God and his host (see vv. 12, 17). (CSB)

Bashan ... depths of the sea. The former (see also v. 15) was the high plateau east of the Jordan, the latter the Mediterranean Sea—none of the enemies will escape (see Am 9:1–4). (CSB)

68:23 Vivid imagery borrowed from the literary conventions of the ancient Near East. Its origins are the exaggerated language of triumphant reports of victory on the battlefield. (CSB)

Illustrated by 1Ki 21:23; 22:38; 2Ki 9:36. (TLSB)

68:24–27 The liturgical procession approaches the temple (see Ps 24; 47). (CSB)

Evidently a procession to the temple or tabernacle (sanctuary) was a part of Israel's worship; it acknowledged the Lord as the true King of Israel. Perhaps this psalm was composed specifically for such a procession and describes its arrangement. (TLSB)

68:26 *Israel* – Patriarch Jacob. (TLSB)

68:27 All Israel is represented, from little Benjamin to powerful Judah, and tribes from the north as well as the south. (CSB)

Two southern tribes and two northern tribes are mentioned to represent all of Israel. (TLSB)

Another heartening thing is the fact that the princes from all tribes vied in giving due honor to the Lord. They competed to serve the most. (Leupold)

Benjamin in the lead. Perhaps reflecting the fact that from the tribe of Benjamin came the first king (Saul), who began the royal victories over Israel's enemies (see 1Sa 11:11; 14:20–23). (CSB)

68:28–31 Prayer for God to continue his conquest of the threatening powers. (CSB)

Tabernacle worship is seen to have worldwide significance. Even non-Israelites will come to this forgiveness (cf Is 2:1–5; 60:1–6; Eph 2:11–22). (TLSB)

We have lived to see the day when this section has been and is being fulfilled through the worldwide spread of the gospel. (PBC)

68:28 *Summon your power.* Or, perhaps, “Command your power to act.” (CSB)

68:29 *Because of your temple.* Because your earthly royal house has been established in Jerusalem. (CSB)

bear you gifts. Acknowledge you by bringing tribute, as subjected kings brought tribute to their conquerors (see 2Sa 8:2, 6, 10; 2Ki 3:4). (CSB)

68:30 *Rebuke.* This word, when predicated of God, usually refers to either (1) the thunder of his fierce majesty by which he wields his sovereign control over cosmic entities repulses his enemies, or the thunder of his wrath. (CSB)

beast among the reeds. Pharaoh (see Eze 29:3). (CSB)

herd of bulls among the calves. Powerful princes supporting the pharaoh, and the lesser princes of other nations. Egypt is singled out here as representative of the hostile nations—because of Israel's past experiences with that world power and because at the time the psalm was composed it was the one great empire on Israel's immediate horizons. (CSB)

Scatter the nations. See v. 1; so that Israel may have peace (see 46:9; 48:4–7; 65:7; 76:3). (CSB)

68:32–35 Climax of the liturgical procession: a call for all kingdoms to hail with praise the God of Israel as the God who reigns in heaven and has established his earthly throne in the temple in Jerusalem (see Ps 47). (CSB)

Procession concludes with all nations invited to join the Israelites in praising the Lord, who is enthroned in His temple. The OT tabernacle was an earthly counterpart to God's heavenly throne (vv 33–34), from which He rules the universe. (TLSB)

68:32 *selah* – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

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68:35 *gives power and strength to his people*. The Lord of all has made Israel his people (his “kingdom”; see Ex 19:5–6), and his rule among them makes them participants in his victorious power (see 29:10–11). (CSB)

These words are an apt summary of God's relationship to his people throughout history. For his awesome deeds we too say, “Praise be to God.” (PBC)

Ps 68 In His sanctuary, God provides His salvation. Without this sanctuary, there is only judgment. Thus, we turn to the Lord and His Word in faith, and we give Him praise. • Summon Your power, O God, by which You have worked among us. Amen. (TLSB)