

SBC – Jan. 8, 2022

Psalm 68:1-35 (NKJV) - “An Ascension Song”

This too is a Psalm of David and it is Messianic in that Paul in Ephesians 4:8-11 applies Psalm 68:18 to the ascension of Christ and His distribution of spiritual gifts to His people the Church.

Psalm 68 is a Psalm of triumph. It is a celebratory procession of ascension that denotes God’s victory and how His people share in that victory. It pictures God as on the March to His dwelling place in Jerusalem and ultimately to His rule in the kingdom. The first and the last verses capture the essence of the Psalm.

Slide # 1

Psalm 68:1 (NKJV)

1 Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.

Psalm 68:35 (NKJV)

35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people.

Blessed be God!

Many commentators believe the occasion for this Psalm was probably when David brought the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem as recorded in 2 Sam. 6:2-18.

This is Israel’s national processional, in which the journey of the ark of the covenant from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion is seen as symbolizing the march of God to ultimate victory. To the Jewish mind, the ark rightly represented the presence of God; when the ark moved, God moved. – **William MacDonald**

The entire Psalm has the feel of a procession that climaxes in triumph and glory to God. And right in the middle is the verse on ascension that is applied to Christ in the New Testament.

Slide # 2

Outline of Psalm 68

vv. 1-6 Let God arise against His enemies to the celebration of His people.

vv. 7-18 God’s victorious march from Egypt/Sinai to Jerusalem.

vv. 19-31 Celebration of God’s victorious majesty.

vv. 32-35 Call on the Nations to Praise the LORD.

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. A Song.

1 Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.

2 As smoke is driven away, So drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

3 But let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.

Verse 1 adapts the words of Num. 10:35 which in effect was Israel's marching cry whenever they would break camp and God would lead them forward.

Slide # 3

Numbers 10:35 (NKJV)

35 So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You."

This is a call for God to go before His people and defeat His enemies which is also for the blessing of His people. It is God Who goes before and leads His people. It is God Who fights their battles. It is God Who brings them into the land of promise and establishes His resting place right in their midst.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, By His name Yah, And rejoice before Him.

5 A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

6 God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

These verses are a poetic description of God's exalted majesty and what He does for His oppressed people. And the call is to praise God for Who He is and what He does.

It is good to be on God's side for He ultimately comforts and delivers the downtrodden and oppressed. But in contrast the rebellious are outside of His blessing.

The name "**YAH**" is a shortened form of **YHWH** which speaks of God's everlasting character that never changes – and hence His faithfulness. This is commonly called God's "covenant name".

7 O God, when You went out before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness, Selah

David now traces God's movement from Sinai to His occupation in the sanctuary of Zion in Jerusalem. God is always out in front leading His people. He ever remains the "Good Shepherd" leading His people to their destiny.

God is here pictured as MARCHING through the wilderness. This is reminiscent of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" which says, "Our God is marching on". This is God on the MARCH!

**8 The earth shook; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
9 You, O God, sent a plentiful rain, Whereby You confirmed Your inheritance, When it was weary.**

It was almost as though nature itself entered into the awesomeness of the event. God's presence was felt. The earth shook, the heavens dropped rain, Sinai was moved (cf. Ex. 19:18). The presence of God was an awesome experience (cf. Judg. 5:4-5).

God works through the weather. He is in charge of the weather. And here He sent rain to refresh His weary people on the journey.

Now the conquest of the promised land under God's leadership is described in verses 10-18.

10 Your congregation dwelt in it; You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor.

11 The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it:

God gave the Word – that is the command to take the Promised Land and this message was spread far wide (cf. Ex. 23:20-33; Deut. 11:22-32). Everyone knew what their "marching orders" under God's leadership was.

12 "Kings of armies flee, they flee, And she who remains at home divides the spoil.

13 Though you lie down among the sheepfolds, You will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver, And her feathers with yellow gold."

14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it, It was white as snow in Zalmon.

Some of this poetic language is unclear but clearly it depicts victorious conquest.

15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan.

16 Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of many peaks? This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in; Yes, the Lord will dwell in it forever.

The mountain of Bashan is thought to poetically refer to mount Hermon which was in the region of Bashan. This mountain range with its many high peaks is pictured as being jealous of Mount Zion because it is there that the LORD has chosen to dwell forever. This is God's special chosen place!

Slide # 4



17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands; The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.

The language here is really depicting the behind the scenes spiritual reality of when David and his men captured the stronghold of the city of David where God would dwell at the Temple in a specialized sense (2 Sam. 5:1-9).

David knew that in reality it was not just him that conquered the city but rather thousands upon thousands of angelic hosts here pictured as riding in chariots. The number twenty thousand is the idea of "tens of thousands and thousands of thousands" in the sense of an innumerable number (cf. Heb. 12:22).

In view here is God choosing Zion as His holy place and then God taking the city with a vast company of angelic hosts – all accomplished through His servant David. But David is careful to give the glory to God.

On the one hand David and his men did it, but behind the scenes it was really God and His angelic forces that brought it to pass.

It is this conquering reality brought about by God that sets the context for the ascension verse of Psalm 66:18.

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the Lord God might dwell there.

The language here of “ascended on high” is the language of going up – of assuming the exalted position. Jerusalem from every direction is UP. One always goes UP to Jerusalem. It is an exalted place, not simply because of the elevation, but because this is God’s chosen place to dwell.

And in doing so God “led captivity captive”. There may be various nuances here but the basic idea is that of defeating and taking one’s foes captive. In ancient times when a king won a victory, he would then lead the captives in victory. This leading the captives was a demonstration of the greatness of his triumph.

The king would not only lead his captives in victory but he would also share the spoils of the victory with his loyal subjects.

Slide # 5

"As great conquerors, when they rode in their triumphal chariots, used to be attended with the most illustrious of their captives led in chains, and were wont to scatter their largesses and bounty among the soldiers and other spectators of their triumphs, so Christ, when he ascended into heaven, as a triumphant conqueror, led captivity captive". – **Matthew Henry**

Paul took this verse (Ps. 66:18) and made spiritual application to Christ’s victory and how at His ascension He gave spiritual gifts to His church.

Slide # 6

Ephesians 4:8–11 (NKJV)

8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.”

9 (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

But note that whereas the Hebrew in Psalm 66:18 says He received gifts Paul in Eph. 4:8 says He GAVE gifts.

Slide # 7**Psalm 68:18 (NKJV)**

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.

Ephesians 4:8 (NKJV)

8 Therefore He says: “*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.*”

Slide # 8

Although the two renderings seem to be opposites, they are not incompatible. If God receives the spoils of war from the enemies in Ps 68, it is not beyond understanding that he would give gifts to those who are on his side as a provision from him as is portrayed in Eph. 4:8. – **Harold Hoehner**

A careful study of Eph. 4:8-11 reveals that emphasis at this point is not on spiritual gifts generally, or gifts given to individuals, but rather on specific people that God has given to the Church.

Slide # 9

These gifts were specifically the gifts (to the church) of 1) apostles, 2) prophets, 3) evangelists, and 4) pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). These four gifts were not gifts given to individuals; rather, they

were **people** who filled these roles and were given to the church so that it might be built up properly as God designed (Ephesians 4:12). (emphasis in bold is mine) – **Gotquestions.org**

The four categories of people given as gifts to the Church are unique in that they have special WORD oriented ministries. Everything builds on the WORD in terms of the building of the Church. That is why these 4 categories of people given to the Church are singled out for special mention. They have ministries that are uniquely WORD-BASED ministries in a special sense. The growth and maturity of the Church develops out of these specialized WORD oriented ministries. These people are Christ's gift to the Church.

Slide # 10

Ephesians 4:11 refers to Spirit-gifted shepherds: “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*” Here Paul is speaking of Spirit-gifted persons, not the office of overseer/elder. Not all Spirit-gifted shepherds have to be elders. The eldership is a shepherding body, but some elders, not all, are Spirit-gifted shepherds (1 Tim. 5:17). – **Alexander Strauch**

It is interesting to note that the Jews incorporate Psalm 68 into their Feast of Pentecost celebration, which relates to the time when Christ sent the Spirit and thus, began the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. These gifts are ultimately from Christ based on His victory at the cross (cf. Acts 2:32-33).

The Church is not an after-thought. It was tucked hidden away in the OT all the time. And now with the unrevealing of redemptive history in the New Testament we can see how it all aligns perfectly with God's sovereign plan and program. As is often stated: “The Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed, the New is in the Old concealed.” How true!

Verses 19-31 consist of basking in God and the victory and blessings that God accomplishes for His people.

19 Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah

The ESV translates this “who daily bears us up”. God continually preserves and sustains us day by day.

20 Our God is the God of salvation; And to God the Lord belong escapes from death.

Truly our times are in God's hands and the ultimate escape from death is spiritual and eternal (cf. 1 Cor. 15).

21 But God will wound the head of His enemies, The hairy scalp of the one who still goes on in his trespasses.

22 The Lord said, "I will bring back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea,

23 That your foot may crush them in blood, And the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from your enemies."

Some commentators think the "hairy scalp" in the ancient world represented long hair worn as a symbol of one having dominant power over others who was characterized as a rebel. Certainly this person is described as an unrepentant rebel against God.

Bringing back from Bashan evidently refers to bringing enemies back (leading the captives back) from the furthest regions. The idea is that these enemies shall not escape. Rather God's people will crush them.

24 They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.

25 The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; Among them were the maidens playing timbrels.

26 Bless God in the congregations, The Lord, from the fountain of Israel.

The picture here is that of a triumphal procession celebrating the victory of God over His enemies.

Note that in verse 18 it is GOD who has "ascended on high" and this truth is applied to Jesus in Eph. 4 showing us again that Jesus is God. Here in verse 24 God is said to be KING and indeed further revelation reveals the King ultimately is Jesus. In both cases we see that the implication is that Jesus is God- which of course He is.

William MacDonald says the psalmist in effect says, "Look, here He comes." In this celebration all the tribes are represented from those in the south (Benjamin/Judah) to those in the north (Zebulun/Naphtali).

27 There is little Benjamin, their leader, The princes of Judah and their company, The princes of Zebulun and the princes of Naphtali.

28 Your God has commanded your strength; Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.

The scene now fast-forwards prophetically to the time of the kingdom when God's triumphant victory for His people will be complete (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 18:7; 45:14; 60:3-7; Ezek. 40-48; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 2:11-13; 6:15; 8:21-22; 14:16-19).

29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem, Kings will bring presents to You.

30 Rebuke the beasts of the reeds, The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples, Till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver.

Scatter the peoples who delight in war.

31 Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.

In the kingdom Jerusalem will be the city of the great King. This will be the worship center of the world. There the kingdom temple will be and it will be there that the kings of the earth will bring their gifts of worship.

Symbolically the call is for God to rebuke the beast like rebels of the world "***Till everyone submits***" and those humbled come with tribute money signifying submission and subservience to God the King. This will include ancient Egypt and far away places such as Ethiopia. In that day they will all come in humble worship bringing gifts and offerings with them.

Verses 32-35 present the climax of the liturgical procession. Here the call is for all nations to give praise to God for what He has done in relation to Israel.

32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord, Selah

33 To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.

34 Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, And His strength is in the clouds.

35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!

The NASB translates verse 35, “O God, Thou art awesome from Thy sanctuary.” Indeed, He will be kingdom come!

We often (rightfully so) place tremendous emphasis on the resurrection of Christ, but His ascension likewise is filled with tremendous significance. Consider these points.

1. Christ’s ascension represents His victory over Satan and His exaltation over all.

Slide # 11

Ephesians 1:20–22 (NKJV)

20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and **seated Him at His right hand** in the heavenly places,

21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And **He put all things under His feet**, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church**,

2. Christ in His ascension left blessing His people.

Slide # 12

Luke 24:49–50 (NKJV)

49 “Behold, **I send the Promise** of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with **power** from on high.”

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and **blessed them**.

3. Christ in His ascension is seated at the Father’s right hand indicating His sacrificial work has been completed and accepted.

Slide # 13

Hebrews 10:12–14 (NKJV)

12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

4. Christ in His ascension sent special “people gifts” to His people the Church for the building up of the body as noted in Eph. 4:8-12.
5. Christ in His ascension is now in the position of being our special representative who ever lives to make intercession for us.

Slide # 14

Hebrews 4:15–16 (NKJV)

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore **come boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to **help in time of need**.

Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV)

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He **always lives to make intercession for them**.

Everything we enjoy today in terms of spiritual power and giftedness is connected to the ascension of Christ. His victory was total and He has poured out spiritual gifts on His people.

And so we say with David, “Oh, sing praises to the Lord” (v. 32). “The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!” (v. 35).

Amen!