

"Let God Arise"

Psalm 68

This psalm is one of the most difficult to understand. Spurgeon (paraphrasing Ferdinand Hitzig) said that this psalm is "a titan very hard to master." Martin Luther referred to it as "a difficult Psalm" because of its use of use of the language (numerous *hapax legomena* - words occurring only once in Scripture) and abrupt changes in literary form.

That said, it's a hymn of victory, depicting the Almighty dealing with mankind – scattering the wicked and saving the righteous.

Most conservative scholars understand this "Psalm or song of David" to be composed for the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant back from the house of Obed-Edom as recorded in 2 Samuel 6:12-23.

- David had previously failed to move the Ark properly, resulting in the death of Uzzah.
- Now, the ark is coming out of the house of Obed-Edom.
- This psalm is the victory parade, so to speak, for that occasion. It is the transport of the Throne of God from obscurity to Mount Zion.

As we study this psalm, we will see specific titles used to describe this victorious God:

- Elohim ("God") – the Creator and Judge (used 26 times).
- Adonai ("Lord") – the Sovereign Master (used 7 times).
- "JAH" (vs. 4) – the shortened, poetic form of *Jehovah*. This is the intimate covenant name.
- Shaddai ("Almighty" - vs. 14) – the Almighty who scatters kings.

We can also see the Savior in this psalm. While this historically describes the Ark ascending Mount Zion, the Holy Spirit (through the Apostle Paul in Eph. 4:8) reveals the ultimate meaning:

- The Ark is a type of Christ.
- Just as the Ark ascended the hill of Zion after conquering the land, Jesus Christ ascended to heaven after conquering sin and death.

I. THE POWER OF HIS PERSON – vs. 1-6

Who God is – the Father of the helpless

A. The plea (vs. 1-3)

1. The invocation (vs. 1) – “Let God arise...” David is quoting Numbers 10:35.
 - a) In the wilderness wanderings, whenever the Ark moved, Moses would shout these words.
 - b) David is connecting Israel’s history. The same God who preserved them in the wilderness is now establishing them in the Holy City.
2. The contrast (vs. 2-3) – the wicked perish (smoke/wax) vs. the rejoicing of the righteous.
3. The inevitability of judgment – when God “arises,” His enemies will have no choice but to flee, for when He returns, it will be in triumph and glory. Not only will they have to flee, but at that point it will be too late for them, and they will perish forever (vs. 2c).

B. The praise (vs. 4)

1. The Name – *JAH*, as already pointed out, is the abbreviated form of *Jehovah* (Yahweh). It is an intense, poetic expression of the Covenant God’s self-existence. It is the “Hallelujah” name.

2. The highway ("rideth upon the heavens") – we are preparing the way for "the Rider of the clouds" (Rev. 1:7).

C. The protection (vs. 5-6)

1. His nature (vs. 5) – a "father of the fatherless" and "judge of the widows."
2. His act (vs. 6) – He sets the solitary in families (grace for the lonely).

II. THE PROCESSION OF HIS PAST – VS. 7-18

What God has done – from Sinai to Zion

A. The wilderness wanderings (vs. 7-10)

1. The march (vs. 7-8) – God marched before His people.
2. The mercy (vs. 9) – God sent a "plentiful rain" to confirm His inheritance.
3. The miracle (vs. 10) – God turned the "weary" land (vs. 9) into a habitable home ("prepared"). They were "poor," totally dependent on God for daily bread (manna).

B. The war and victory (vs. 11-14)

1. The proclamation (vs. 11) – the Lord gave the word; the great company (the choir) published the victory.

The term for "of those that published it" (**הַמְבַּשְּׂרוֹת**) actually refers to a choir of women. The use here shows that in those days, when the Lord won a battle, the women were the first to sing about it (like Miriam or the women greeting David). They were the ancient

"publishing company."

To apply this verse to the New Testament and the Age of Grace:

- a) God wins the battle (the cross and resurrection).
- b) God gives the Word (the gospel).
- c) We (the church, the bride) are the "choir" that picks up the message.
- d) Just as those women ran to tell the city that the enemy was defeated, we run to tell the world that sin and death are conquered.

2. The transformation (vs. 13-14)

- a) From soot to silver (vs. 13) – though we were among the "pots" (slavery/filth), He made us like a "dove" (silver/gold).
- b) From dark to light (vs. 14) – He turned the darkness of war into "snow in Salmon."

C. The way to Zion (vs. 15-18)

- 1. The election (vs. 15-16) – the "high hills" (Bashan, rising over 9,000 feet, a type of worldly pride) are jealous of the "little hill" (Zion, representing God's grace). God chooses the humble.
- 2. The escort (vs. 17) – The "chariots of God" (20,000 angels) surround the hill.
 - a) The word for "angels" in this verse (שׂוֹמְרֵי) is not the normal one found in the Old Testament (מַלְאָכִים). This is a word (used only this time in the OT) that comes from a word that means "to repeat" or "to change." It literally means "thousands of repetitions" or "thousands upon

thousands."

- b) By translating this as "angels," the psalmist connects back to Deut. 33:2, where God came from Sinai with "ten thousand of saints" (holy ones or angels).

Deuteronomy 33:2

² And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand *went* a fiery law for them.

- c) You cannot count God's army. It is "thousands of repetitions." Just when you think you've counted them all, there is another thousand.

2 Kings 6:16-17 [Elisha at Dothan up against the Syrian army]

¹⁶ And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

3. The exaltation (vs. 18) – the triumph of the King

Ephesians 4:8-10

⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

- a) The ascent – the Ark going up Zion is a picture of Christ going up to heaven ("ascended on high").
- b) The arrest – "Led captivity captive" – two things

in view here:

- (1) The conquest of spiritual enemies – sin, death, and Satan (our captors) and made them His prisoners. He paraded them openly (Col. 2:15).

Colossians 2:13-15

¹³ And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; ¹⁴ Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; ¹⁵ *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

- (2) The transfer of Old Testament saints (the “captives” are removed). Before the cross, the OT saints went to “Abraham’s bosom” (Paradise). They could not enter the immediate presence of God until the blood of Christ was shed. When Christ ascended (“ascended on high”), He emptied Abraham’s Bosom, taking those righteous souls from the “captivity” of Sheol and transferring them to the third heaven.

c) The appropriation:

- (1) In the OT – the King demands tribute (“received”).
- (2) In the NT – the King shares the spoil (“gave”).
- (3) By application, we have spiritual gifts today because Jesus won the war on Calvary.

III. THE PROVISION OF HIS PRESENT – VS. 19-23

This section shifts from the national (Israel’s history) to

the personal (the believer's daily care).

A. The blessing of daily grace (vs. 19)

1. The praise – "Blessed be the Lord [Adonai]"
2. The process – He "daily loadeth us." He is involved in the daily struggles of our lives.
 - a) "Loadeth" (עָמַס) – it means "to lift up a load," "to place a burden," or "to carry." It is the word used for loading a donkey.

This can mean two things:

- (1) He loads us with goodness – "*with benefits*" (notice these words are in italics, meaning they were supplied by the translators): He piles blessings upon us until our wagon creaks under the weight of His grace.
- (2) He carries the load: when the burden is too heavy for us, He shoulders it Himself. As Isaiah 46:3-4 says, He carries Israel from the womb.

Isaiah 46:3-4

³ Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: ⁴ And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.

b) "Daily" (יוֹם יוֹם)

- (1) The emphasis is on the word for "day" doubled – day, day. God's grace is not just received for salvation as a one-time event, but is a daily occurrence.

(2) Just like manna was supplied every day, so will grace be supplied every day.

- Like a ship loaded down with cargo, our lives are weighted down with His mercy.

B. The authority over death (vs. 20)

1. "The issues from death" – the word "issues" (תוצאות), as used here, means escape route, or exit. God holds the keys; He knows the way out of the grave.
2. The ultimate "issue (exit) from death" was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and because He knew (and used) the exit, we will too.

C. The victory over rebellion (vs. 21-23).

1. The target – the "head" (pride, authority) of the enemy.
2. The persistence – the judgment is for him who "goeth on still in his trespasses" (unrepentant).
3. The reach – from the heights of Bashan to the bottom of the sea, God's justice is inescapable.

IV. THE PROPHECY OF HIS POWER – VS. 24-35

The result of God's victory is worldwide worship, beginning with Israel and extending to the world.

A. The order of the sanctuary (vs. 24-27)

1. The sight (vs. 24) – "They have seen thy goings, O God..." Applying this to us today, we see the world watching the church worship and serve the Lord.
2. The singers (vs. 25-26) – worship involves order and joy.

3. The unity (vs. 27) – David mentions "Little Benjamin" (South) and "Princes of Judah" (South) alongside "Zebulun" and "Naphtali" (North).

The victory of God brings the divided nation together. Applied to the church, there is no North or South; we are one body.

B. The submission of the nations (vs. 28-31)

1. The prayer for strength (vs. 28-30)
2. The prophecy (vs. 31) – this looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom when Gentile nations will bring tribute to the King in Jerusalem.

C. The source of strength (vs. 32-35)

1. The call (vs. 32-34) – "Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth..."
2. The benediction (vs. 35)

Conclusion:

We started this study with a prayer (vs. 1) – "Let God arise..." We saw Him march through the wilderness, conquer the enemies, ascend up on high, and daily load us with benefits.

The psalm ends with a promise. Verse 35: *"The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people."*

When we become weak because of the battles of life, we don't need to hope for strength. We serve the God of "the Procession." He has already won the war; He just asks us to walk in His strength.