

Psalm 68

Introduction – Derek Kidner calls this Psalm “*this rushing cataract of a psalm – one of the most boisterous and exhilarating in the Psalter.*” Images seem to tumble over one another, some are obscure, and we can lose track of what we are singing (think, “*from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli*”). But here are a couple of markers to help. The first two verses recall the words spoken (sung) whenever God called Israel to take up the ark and move (Num 10:35) and then recalls the triumphant march through the wilderness (v7, 12, 14). Verses 7-8 are very similar to words of the victory song of Deborah (Judges 5:4-5). The Psalm declares, “*God is the God of salvation*” (v20) and all the nations are commanded to affirm this (v32). Historically, this has been a battle hymn for many, including the Covenanters and the Huguenots, fathers of our Protestant faith. And we will see that this Psalm is a Messianic Psalm. In short, this is a Psalm of victory over enemies as a pretext for praying for more expected victories. “*Let God arise! Let His enemies be scattered!*” A people who know they are on the Lord’s side can sing this Psalm with confidence.

Joyful Confidence in the Present Conflict (vv1-6) – The Psalm begins with trouble and a cry to God for help. Let God scatter His enemies and let their destruction be total (vv1-2). Let the righteous rejoice with singing and be glad before God (vv3-4). For He defends the defenseless, adopts the lonely, and frees those who are bound (vv5-6). The Psalm-singer is confident, super-confident, in the Lord. The wandering in the desert was a kind of procession, marching and conquering even as those years passed by – and the various tribes marched in set formation (v17, 26-27). These first verses are dominated with triumph. When God moves, what He intends happens. He is our Savior. He is our deliverer. Gathered for battle, the Psalm-singer directs a psalm of confident joy.

Songs of Historic Victories in God’s Presence (vv7-18) – The joyful confidence in the present trouble comes not only by meditating on Who God is, but What God has done for His people in the past. When God moves, creation itself is shaken (v7), rain comes at His Word (vv8-9) and He provides goodness for the needy (v10). These verses bring to mind the giving of the covenant at Sinai, and also the provision of the land with rain and fruitfulness (Deut 11:10-14). Kings fled (v12, i.e. Josh 10:16) and the women divided the great spoils of war (vv12-14). And while Bashan might have great mountain peaks, they envy Jerusalem, set upon His mountain, where God has chosen to make His abode (vv15-16). Myriads of angelic chariots surround Him (v17), where He has ascended on high, leading the captive into His captivity with much gift-giving (v18).

The God Who Loads Us with Benefits (vv19-20) – vv7-18 could be a conflation of several battles won, of many deliverances from the enemy, of centuries of spoils being given to His people. And so, as in a chorus, the Psalm-singer directs us, “*The God of our salvation! Our God is the God of salvation!...*”

Confidence in Future Victory and the Role of Worship (vv20-27) – God promised the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent, and vv21-23 recount at least two instances (the defeat of Og, king of Bashan, and the end of the Pharaoh at the Red Sea) that cause the Psalm-singer to say that God “*will*” do it again. Or maybe he is saying that regardless of the height (Bashan) or the depth (sea) of their attempted escape, God will have His victory. And where does the Psalm-singer “*see*” this victory coming from? The worship of God by God’s people. The singing and processing with orderly, reverent, and jubilant worship. Worship is warfare. David brought the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle with such a procession (vv24-25, 1 Chron 13:8). And the writer to the Hebrews says that our worship shakes the world (Heb 12:25-29). The gathered congregation in worship is “*the fountain of Israel*” – the center and source of victory (vv26-27).

Victory over All the World (vv28-35) – God continues to strengthen His people (v28). Kings will bring tribute (v29) while beasts and those who love war will be repulsed (v30). Yes, kings and kingdoms will come from all over (vv31-32) singing praises to Him Who rides over it all and calls out with a mighty voice (v33). Do you hear the victory? Can you join in the singing of this victory (vv34-35)?

Let God Arise in Times of Trouble – Remember this Psalm begins when the Psalm-singer, and the people of God corporately, are in trouble. That is when to sing this Psalm. One congregant in our church with a large family once told me that when the kids were all out of sorts, he would gather the horde together and make them sing this Psalm all the way through. He said attitudes changed. This call-to-war-psalm is for the church militant and should be used for battling principalities and powers and, when the church is under persecution, for protecting and rescuing our people. The singing reminds us of Who God is, What God has done, What we can expect of Him, and Where this is all going.

Let God Arise in Christ’s Ascension – Verse 18 is quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4:8 speaking of Christ’s ascension and reign, giving gifts to the church to build her up (Eph 4:9-16). As tumultuous, obscure, and inscrutable as this Psalm is, going this way and that, so is the reign of Christ from our vantage point. Someone once said that the history of the church is a series of victories cleverly disguised as defeats. How are current geo-political, military, and international events guiding the building of the kingdom of God? We see knots and tangles from our perspective because we are under the loom. But God controls the tapestry and is creating something beautiful in His

time, at which time we will say “Amen” to every last thread. But He has placed us here in the perspective we have for a reason: to sing Psalm 68 for instance.

Let God Arise in Our Prayers – We are driven into troubles so that we will have our partial perspective, and He wants us to cry out to Him, knowing Who He is and What He has done, and Where He is taking this. How many things are wrong in this country, in this generation, over this world today? It would only take a nod from God and everything would be put right. But the mess is put here by God so that we will get stirred up and pray to Him. Personal application: if your life is full of troubles, and you are a Christian, why is your life not also full of prayer? *“Rise up, O God, and scatter these enemies/troubles!”*

Let God Arise in His Promises and Plans – God is more than inviting as the Psalm-singer ends (vv32-35). He is commanding. And because this Psalm has been clearly declared as a song about the Ascended Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, none may sing this song faithfully without directing it to Him. Jesus is Lord. He is Lord over heaven and earth. He is King of all kings and Lord of all Lords. He will reign at God’s right hand bringing all nations into subjection to Him. There are no “get out of jail cards” for Jews who do not bow the knee to Christ, and there are none for anyone else of any stripe (Rom 1-3, esp. 3:23). You are either for Him or against Him. You are either a friend of God (Jesus) or an enemy. And no one can say “Jesus is LORD” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3), the same Spirit Who inspired this Psalm.

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