

# “AN UNSURPASSED PSALM”

## PSALM 68

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### I. ITS CHARACTER

- A. Poetic beauty:** Most every commentator speaks about the exuberance of this psalm. Kidner remarks: “This rushing cataract of a psalm [is] one of the most boisterous and exhilarating in the Psalter” (p. 238). Delitzsch remarks on the style (and some of the expressions of the Psalm) resembling that of the song of Deborah, “stalking along upon the highest pinnacle of hymnic feeling and recital; all that is most glorious in the literature of the earlier period is concentrated in it” (1346). Delitzsch also notes that in this psalm we find allusions to several OT expressions: “Moses memorable words, Moses’ blessing, the prophecies of Balaam, the Deuteronomy, the Song of Hannah” (Ibid.). Perowne calls this psalm “the most glowing, the most spirited, and the most powerful which exists in the whole Psalter.” Most everyone who comments on this psalm recognize it as “the work of a poet of no ordinary genius” (P. 516). Leupold, quoting Maclaren, notes that the psalm “is unsurpassed, if not unequalled, in grandeur, lyric fire, and sustained rush of triumphant praise” (489).
- B. Use of divine names:** One of the most prominent characteristics of this psalm is the use of the divine names. By far Elohim is the predominantly used name, occurring 23 times in the psalm and found in every verse of 1-10, 3 times in v. 8. Moreover, David uses numerous other divine names here—“it is as though the whole cornucopia of divine names were poured out upon it”
- C. PLACE IN THE TEXT:** Psalms 67 and 68 are naturally place together, not only 1) because they both have “a psalm, a song,” but also because they both begin with words quoted from the Pentateuch: Psalm 67 with the Priestly Benediction of Num. 6:25; Psalm 68 with the words of Num. 10:35 spoken by Moses when the ark would set out before the people of God in their wilderness march. Moreover, both psalms end with an emphasis upon the universal praise of God by the nations of the world –see vv. 32ff with 67:3-7.

### II. AUTHORSHIP OF THE PSALM

- A.** Many, maybe even the majority of, commentators have cast doubts upon—or even outright rejected—the Davidic authorship of this psalm due to both its style, its vocabulary [numerous hapax legomena—13], and some of the terms used in the psalm for places and people. Even Delitzsch, who usually accepts the accuracy of Psalm titles, dates the psalm in Davidic times, but doubts that David wrote the Psalm; he bases his argument on the use of “Zalmon” in v. 14, “Benjamin and the northern tribes” in vv. 27, and allusions to the Song of Deborah and to the Book of Judges in general and says that these seem to give to the psalm “an appearance of being Ephraimitish” (1348). I have found the arguments to be unconvincing.

- III.** **OCCASION:** There are two predominant opinions that are both plausible; the second may deserve the preference.

- 1) The psalm was written for the time of the ark's procession into Jerusalem as described in II Sam. 6:12-19. P. notes that this has been the position of the majority of interpreters (513).
  - a) Favoring it is the opening with the very words used for the setting out of the ark with the camp of Israel during the movements in the wilderness—see Num. 10:35: “Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; and let those who hate Him flee before Him.” However, Delitzsch turns this point against the occasion, for the opening words of the psalm depict Moses’ words as the ark set out ahead of the legions of Israel in their triumphant march through the desert—not the march of the ark into the city (see p. 1348).

That being said, it is true that vv. 7-18 depicts the past events of wilderness march, conquest of Canaan, and settlement of God in Zion and His selection of it over Bashan (v. 15-16) and Sinai (v. 17). Perowne notes that the language used in v. 18 is that of “an earthly conqueror, who, after having vanquished his enemies, and taken possession of their country, marches in solemn procession at the head of his troops, to occupy the city which he has selected as his capital and the seat of empire” (p. 512).

- b) Also, the procession up the mount where the ark would be enshrined is portrayed in vv. 18, 24-27. Such may be true, but this procession in the original movement of the ark was not after a triumphant military campaign such as seems to be described in this psalm. The ark had “long since taken up his abode upon the holy mountain” and this psalm “is one of the psalms of war and victory....”The exalted one...rides along through the highest heavens at the head of His people, casts down all powers hostile to Him and to His people, and compels all the world to confess that the God of Israel rules from His sanctuary with invincible might” (Del. p. 1348).
- 2) Similar to the first view, but differing from it, is the view that the Psalm was written on the occasion of some significant victory of David during which the ark had gone out before the people of Israel.
  - a) Some suggest the victory of David over the Syrians and Edomites in II Sam. 8; but we have no mention of the ark being taken on that occasion.
  - b) Delitzsch plausibly suggests that the occasion was “**the Syro-Ammonitish war of David**” when the Israelite army had evidently taken the ark before them as shown in II Sam. 11:11 (ark and the army in huts). After the war’s conclusion the ark was brought back successfully to Jerusalem. But, Del. suggests that the psalm was composed while the campaign was still in progress as apparently indicated in vv. 19-23 and due to the futuristic references to later submission of kings to Yahweh (p. 1348). Del. suggests that the psalm was composed when Joab led forth his army as described in II S. 10:7-8. Del. maintains that the pageantry described in vv. 24-27 are in anticipation of the confident outcome. David writes “in the spirit of faith” and he “sees in the single victory a pledge of His victory over all the nations of the earth” mentioned in vv. 28-31. David expresses “the longing of prayer and the confidence of hope” which “soar aloft to the height of prophecy, before which futurity lies as a fulfilled fact” (Ibid.).

#### IV. **OUTLINE:**

1. Prologue of Praise and Triumph of God over His enemies (1-6).
2. God's march before His people in the wilderness (7-10)
3. God's settlement of His people in the land of promise (11-14)
4. God's choice of Zion for His dwelling and His triumphant procession into it (15-18)
5. God's resulting actions on behalf of His people by defeating His enemies (19-23)
6. God's triumphant procession into Zion after a great victory (24-27)
7. Assurance of God's continued favor on His people and the subservience of the nations (28-31).
8. Epilogue—worship of God by all the nations (32-35).

We may divide the middle sections of the psalm into two parts—

- a. The victorious march of God from Egypt that culminates in His dwelling place at Jerusalem (7-18);
- b. The power and majesty of His regime seen in the ascendancy of His people and the flow of worshippers and vassals to His footstool (19-31).

#### V. **TYOLOGY AS SEEN IN NT USAGE AND QUOTATION:**

Kidner calls this “the history and prophecy of salvation” that is here “set out in Israelite terms,” but in **Eph. 4:7-16** is shown to be typical of the far greater fulfillment in the ascension and session of Christ after His death and resurrection wherein He “led captivity captive, to share out better spoils of victory than these in the gift (and gifts) of the Spirit” — and I would add, the gifted men to serve the church (p. 238). We may also compare Acts 2:33. Kidner notes that from ancient times this psalm has been used for the celebration of Pentecost, as even it has been so used for the Jewish celebration of the harvest Feast of Pentecost—or Weeks—in their synagogues (p. 238).

It is best to see the psalm as having application and meaning for its own time, but also to a degree having divinely intended prophetic application to Christ and His triumphant ascension and session in heaven—from whence he returns to totally conquer all earth's enemies and establish His universal rule. That being said, there is no justification to press every detail of the psalm into a future mold and give every part a messianic application. When the interpreter considers the common OT understanding of the solidity of Yahweh with His people in their experiences, and the place of Messiah in that plan and program, it is not difficult to account for the messianic application made by Paul in Ephesians 4. See more on the specific verses below.

#### CONCLUSION

We have an exciting and informative, challenging, and edifying trip ahead of us the next few weeks. What will God teach us through this psalm?