

Psalm 68:1-18: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Psalm 68 verses 1 to 18. To the choir master, a psalm of David, a song. God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered, and those who hate him shall flee before him.

As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away. As wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God. But the righteous shall be glad, they shall exult before God, they shall be jubilant with joy. 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, father of the fatherless and protector of widows, is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home, he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land. O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the one of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad, you restored your inheritance as it languished, your flock found a dwelling in it, in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy. The Lord gives the word, the women who announce the news are a great host. The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee. The women at home divide the spoil. Though you men lie among the sheepfolds, the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold. When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalmon. O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan, O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan, 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. The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands. The Lord is among them. Sinai is now in the sanctuary. 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. Psalm 68 is a difficult yet a glorious psalm, celebrating the power and the triumph of the Lord over his enemies. At its heart lies a procession, as the people move up from the historic realms associated with the Lord's presence up to Jerusalem. The exodus and the period following it are described as a sort of procession of the Lord, the God over the nations, moving in triumph to Zion, the place of his great enthronement. Some commentators, such as Derek Kidner, suggest that we should associate the psalm with the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem in 2 Samuel chapter 6. The psalm is a psalm of exuberant praise. It's quite fitting for such a joyous occasion.

In Numbers chapter 10 verses 35 to 36 we read, The psalm begins with words that seem to allude to this announcement, the announcement given as the Ark leads the people on their journey. The verses that follow expound upon this. With the opening words, the psalm evokes a joyful procession of the people with the Ark of the Covenant at their head, praising the Lord as they move towards Jerusalem. The enemies of the Lord are compared to smoke that is driven away, or wax that melts before fire. They cannot stand up to the power of God. The perishing of the wicked is contrasted with the joy of the righteous, who are established by God's coming.

God rides through the deserts towards Jerusalem, his resting place. A shout is taken up by the people as they prepare the way for him. The hearer might think of a later passage of scripture here, in Isaiah chapter 40 verses 3 to 10, which declares the Lord's coming up from the wilderness to Mount Zion to reign. A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

[4 : 1 6] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, Cry, and I said, What shall I cry?

All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower

