

God Who Rises, Rescues, and Rules

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[0 : 00] It's a long one. Yeah, it is a long one. It's longer than usual. And it's considered one of the most difficult psalms to interpret in the Bible.

We'll give it our shot. Psalm 68. I'll read it out loud for us. 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 exalt before God. They shall be jubilant with joy. Sing to God. Sing praises to his name. Lift up a song to him who rise through the deserts.

His name is the Lord. Exalt before him. Father of the fatherless. And protector of widows. Is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home.

[1 : 06] 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. Selah. 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 the dwelling in it. In your goodness, O God, you provide it 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 sheepfold. The wings of a dove covered with silver.

Its pinions with shimmering gold. When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalman. O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan. O many-peak mountain, mountain of Bashan.

[2 : 05] Why do you look with hatred, O many-peak 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 made while there.

Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up. God is our salvation. Selah. Our God is a God of salvation, and to God the Lord belong deliverances from death.

But God will strike the heads of his enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways.

The Lord said, I will bring them back from Bashan. I will bring them back from the depths of the sea, that you may strike your feet in their blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from the foe.

Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. The singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines. Bless God in the great congregation, the Lord, O you who are of Israel's fountain.

[3 : 16] There is Benjamin, the least of them in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebelin, the princes of Naphtali. Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us.

Because of your temple at Jerusalem, kings shall bear gifts to you. Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herds of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute.

Scatter the peoples with delight in war. Nobles shall come from Egypt. Cush shall hasten to stretch out our hands to God. O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord, Selah.

To him who rise in the heavens, the ancient heavens, behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God from his sanctuary, the God of Israel. He is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God. Amen. So, Psalm 68 is really about the presence of God.

[4 : 26] And it's really, the main point is that we should worship the God who rises before us, rescues among us, and rules over us. And it's those three movements we see, and there's three parts.

In verses 1 to 10, it's about how God rises on behalf of his people who are embattled by enemies. And then verses 11 to 23 is about how God rescues those people from their enemies. And then verses 24 to 35 is about how God triumphantly now reigns over his people after that. So, it's kind of a three-part movement between the battle to the victory to kind of the celebration, the procession after the victory.

And in the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant, which was the gold-covered wooden chest that represented God's footstool, right? So, if God dwelt in heaven, the footstool was considered the, God put his feet on it, and that was considered the Ark of the Covenant.

And this was the embodiment of the presence of God. And so, in Numbers 10, 35 to 36, it said that whenever the Ark set out, Moses said, Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.

[5 : 37] And that's really the practice that's being alluded to here in verses 1 to 2. Because it says, God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered, right? 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.

So, it's a picture of God arousing himself into battle, and how he marches before his people. And that's why it says in verse 7, Oh, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness.

So, God's not pictured here as that cowardly general, right? Who hides in a bunker somewhere while his men go out to fight. He's the one that leads before us, goes before us into battle. And when he comes into battle, his enemies are scattered and flee like smoke, just driven away as wax melts before the fire.

So, it's like when you snuff out a fire from a candle, right? You don't need to try to blow away the smoke. Just that's what it does. That's all. It vanishes, it disappears, it flees. In the same way, when God comes into battle, the enemies just flee like smoke.

In the same way, like wax, though it feels solid and substantive, as soon as you bring it before the heat of the fire, it crumples, right? It loses its form and shape. So, the enemies crumple and lose their courage and fail.

[6 : 49] Their strength failed before the presence of God. They perish. But the righteous, on the other hand, he says, shall be glad, they shall exalt before God, they shall be jubilant with joy.

So, for that reason, the psalmist, it may be David because it says it's the psalm of David, he tells us to sing praises to God in verse 4. Sing to God, sing praises to his name.

Lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts. His name is the Lord. Exalt before him. And this is reminiscent of prophecy in Isaiah 43, which said, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. So, this is the God who saves people from the desert. He brought Israel to the wilderness. In the same way, the Messiah, when he comes, right? He comes through the wilderness. And then, verses 5 to 6, the psalmist provides more reasons to praise him. It says, A father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

[7 : 51] God settles the solitary in a home. He leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land. I love this image, right? This is one that we're familiar with, of the God who is the father to the fatherless, right?

He's the benevolent father of his household, his family, and he protects those who are most vulnerable, right? And in the ancient world, there is no one more vulnerable than the orphans and the widows, right?

Because they have no recourse to survival, in most cases, without family members to support them, and especially without fathers. But God proves himself to be father to these people.

He's the father to the fatherless. And over and over again, throughout Scripture, God shows his special care and attention for the orphans and the widows, those who need protection. And so he

says, God puts the solitary, those who are isolated and lonely, he settles them in a home. And he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land. And not only does God protect the weak, so he's a protector of the weak, but he says he's also a provider for the needy.

[8 : 55] If you look at verses 7 to 10, This is an allusion to God's deliverance in Judges 4-5.

And then there's obviously a theme here of wilderness. Early in verse 4, he mentioned God who rides through the deserts. Now here in verse 7, he speaks about God who marched through the wilderness.

And both images really depict God rising and going before his people into battle in the wilderness. And it's as if he's riding his chariot through the wilderness, or he's marching in there.

And this showcases God's power. The fact that he cannot be stopped. Because even though nowadays, you know, people like living in desert regions, you know, like, I mean, because it's sunny all the time, right?

But it's, at least in the ancient world, those are not considered inhabitable lands, right? Because you need water to survive. You need to be able to farm. You need rain. You need rivers, right?

[10 : 08] So it's, and that's the, and here, and it's, but when, even though these are desert lands, wilderness, when God goes through it, marches through it, something amazing happens.

The heavens pour down rain before God. And the rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad. And this is polemic against the worship of Baal, who was considered by the pagan nations surrounding Israel, the God of rain, right?

So they're saying that, and because the seduction of Baal's cult was huge in Israel, because they need, they relied on rain for their daily life. And, but the psalmist here is telling us that it's not Baal who brings rain.

It's the Yahweh who can bring rain, even in the wilderness. He is the rider on the clouds, the rider through the desert. And then, and so this is a helpful phrase.

He's the protector of the weak. He's a provider for the needy. He's the one that goes before us into battle. He's the one rises before us. So if you feel weak right now, right?

[11 : 11] If you feel isolated or powerless or vulnerable in any way, then you can remember that God rises and goes before you. That he's, then when he does, his enemies flee like smoke and melt like wax.

And if you feel needy right now, like you need provision from God, right? Then you could, then you can recognize whether you need money or, you know, companionship or friendship or comfort. God rises before us and goes before us. And he's the father to the fatherless and protector of widows. And he's not, you know, sending us alone. He's not making a deal with tribulations alone. He goes first. He gets gone in before us to protect us and provide for us. Then having painted that picture of the God who rises before us, in verses 11 to 23, Psalmist paints a picture of the God who rescues us in battle victoriously.

Verses 11 to 13 says, The Lord gives the word. The woman who announced the news are a great host. The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee. The woman at home divide the spoil.

[12 : 13] Though you men lie among the sheepfolds, the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold. As soon as he enters the battle, it's won, right? And so they announce, he announces, the Lord gives the word.

And then the woman at home announced the great news, spread the word. That the kings of the armies, they flee, they flee. And to flee, it's the word that's used to describe birds that flutter away, right?

It's, they flee like these birds that are scared to be trampled on. And as a result, the woman at home divide the spoil. And then dividing the spoil is compared to the image of the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold.

A dove is often used in scripture as a symbol for God's people, Israel. So in Psalm 74, 19, it says, Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts.

Do not forget the life of the poor forever. It's the dove representing Israel, God's people. And so here, the dove probably represents Israel, and the woman who are dividing the spoil.

[13 : 14] So as the dove, they're, they're, they're, they're, it's, it's kind of like, like a dove that's gilded, you know, has gold and silver around it. Like it's preening to, you know, show, showcase what he has.

In a similar way, these women who are dividing the spoils at home are, are, are, are sharing and showing the world, this is what we have from our victory. They're kind of rejoicing, exalting in their victory. And they're able to do this and rejoice in their victory won from the battle.

And not because the men were not there to fight on their behalf, because it says that, that though you men lie among the sheepfolds in verse 13, that's an illusion.

That's a similar expression is used in Judges 5, 16. You guys know the story of Deborah, right? And Deborah and Barak, the commander of the Israelites army, they go into battle, they defeat the king of Canaan, Jabin, and then Sisera, the commander of the army.

And then they celebrate in song after the victory in Judges 5. And, but the tribe of Reuben didn't show up for the battles. And so they say about them, why did you sit still among the sheepfolds to hear the whistling for the flocks, right?

[14:22] So it's not just our generation of men that are prone to the idols of passivity and laziness and irresponsibility and immaturity, right? I mean, the men of Israel were immature.

They weren't, they stayed behind and didn't do anything. Yet even then, even that's the case, God single-handedly saved them, delivered them so that these women at home can divide the spoils.

And then verse 14 continues, when the Almighty scatters kings, there let snow fall on Zalman. No one really knows what that means, but the Zalman means black.

And so there may be a poetic contrast here of making something that was black white, right? So snow falling on Zalman. So that kind of reversal of fortunes that God has brought about for his people.

And then the psalmist turns his attention to two other personified mountains. First, in verse 15, he brings attention to the mountain of God, which is Mount Zion.

[15:19] And then later, he addresses mountain of Bashan, or Bashan, which he describes as the many-peaked mountain. Bashan was an area known throughout Scripture for its fertility and for having these strong bulls, fat cows, and fierce lions.

And for that reason, he came to represent a symbol of power and wealth. And so therefore, it personifies really the glory and power of the nations that surround Israel. But even though they have much to show for themselves, God didn't choose that mountain to do all among them.

So they're jealous. So they are saying, so in verse 16, 17, it says, 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. So the Sinai, where God met Israel, revealed himself, is now thought to be in Mount Zion, because that's where the presence of God is.

And then, verses 18 to 19, described the God's triumphant procession after his victory. 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.

[16:36] Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up. God is our salvation. Selah. And so here, in verses 20 to 23, the God's salvation of his people is contrasted with his striking of his enemies.

And here it says, it is the Lord to whom belong deliverances from death. That's again a polemic against Baal, because the Hebrew word for death is mot, which is also the name of the God, basically, that was supposed to be chief enemy of Baal.

But he's saying here, it's not Baal who defeats death, it's the Lord who delivers from death, from mot. And here, and he strikes his enemies.

The hairy crown probably just represents his head. That's, you know, big-headed, boasting like a crown. And then, and the images of, you know, striking your feet in their blood, right?

It's, God brings all those enemies who had fled back so that Israelites, his people, can exalt in their victory over them and strike their feet in their blood.

[17:48] That image captures that. Tongues of the dogs, licking the blood, that's another image of complete annihilation and humiliation of the enemies of God.

And so, that's the God who is among us to rescue us. So then, whatever we're in the midst of, whether it's sin or suffering, we can remember that God's with us to help us, to rescue us.

And then, the final movement of the psalm, after describing the victory of the God who rescues us, the psalmist transitions to, in verses 24 to 35, to celebrate the God who rules over us.

It says, in verses 24 to 27, your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. The singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines. Bless God in the great congregation, the Lord, O you who are of Israel's fountain. There is Benjamin, the least of them in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

[18 : 50] But it's not just Israelites. Those tribes represent all of Israel. And it's not just the Israelites. It's also Egypt, it says in verses 28 to 33.

And the beasts, and among the reeds, those are all symbols that are typically used in Old Testament about Egypt. But Egypt as a representation of foreign powers, right? And so they also recognize God and come to worship Him. And then that brings the psalm to a climactic close in verses 34 to 35. Ascribe power to God whose majesty was over Israel and whose power is in the skies.

Awesome is God from His sanctuary, the God of Israel. He is the one who gives power and strength to His people. Blessed be God. It's a repetition of the word power here, right, five times, highlighting God's power as the one whose majesty is over Israel, who rules over Israel.

So this goes from God who rises before us, the God who is among us to rescue, and then God who rules over us. And then that exhortation to repeat it, to blessed be God, to bless Him, to praise Him, from verse 35, from verse 19 is repeated in verse 35.

[20 : 06] And this God ultimately who rises before us and rescues among us and rules over us is revealed to us ultimately and definitively in Jesus Christ, right? And that's why in Ephesians 4, 7 to 8, Apostle Paul quotes this psalm.

He quotes verse 18 of this psalm, and he says, But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.

So the psalm talked about how God, after defeating His enemies, led His captives behind them in triumphant procession, ascended to His mountain abode, and He received gifts from men.

And out of that, the Israelites received their spoils, right? And so in a similar way, it's Christ who now defeats the spiritual authorities and rulers. And after His ascension, it says He received the Holy Spirit from the Father, and He distributes the gifts among His people.

And so that's how Paul's connecting this, that this victory of God that's seen here in this psalm pointed to and was fulfilled in what Christ did on the cross. And the way He defeated His enemies, the way He went before us, the way He rescued among us, and the way He ruled over us, it's through the cross.

[21 : 25] That's His throne. That's how He rescues. That's how He saves His people and delivers us. And that's why verse 19-20 can be appropriately applied to Christ. The Lord daily bears us up.

God is our salvation. Our God is a God of salvation. And to God the Lord belong deliverances from death. Apart from the grace of God, there's no reason why we do not descend to hell at this very moment.

And it's because we are united to Christ, to faith, because of His common grace, humanity. That's what preserves us and that's Christ has saved us. So it's appropriate to say that Christ daily bears us up.

He is our salvation. He's the one sustaining us at this very moment. And so we need to look to Him for our hope and in faith that He's the one that goes before us in all that we face.

He is the one that rescues among us and He's the one that rules over us. And He rules over us even now, right? He didn't just save us and leave us to ourselves. He's still ruling. He's still in control.

[22 : 31] He's still sovereign. So with that in mind, let's sing another song and pray. Thank you.