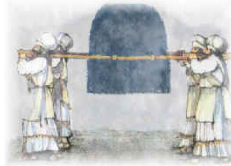


# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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## Psalm 68 — Let's Celebrate!

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 68

- “This rushing cataract of a psalm—one of the most boisterous and exhilarating in the Psalter—may have been composed for David’s procession with the ark ‘from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing’ (2 Sa. 6:12).”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 238.
- Psalm 68 is the climactic celebration of God’s greatness, which has been the focus of Psalms 56–67.
- “A Song” in the heading links Psalm 68 to the preceding Psalms 62–67.
- Bible scholars consider Psalm 68 one of the most difficult psalms to translate and to interpret.
- This psalm is also a song of military triumph.
  - ✓ Psalm 68 was the French Huguenots’ battle song in key engagements in 1573, 1589, and 1621.
  - ✓ Psalm 68 was a favorite of both Charlemagne and Oliver Cromwell.
  - ✓ When Moscow celebrated the retreat of Napoleon in 1812, the sermon text at the service was Psalm 68:1.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 68 (NAU)

**68:1** A Psalm of David. A Song.

Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,  
And let those who hate Him flee before Him.

**68:2** As smoke is driven away, *so* drive *them* away;  
As wax melts before the fire,  
*So* let the wicked perish before God.

- 68:3** But let the righteous be glad;  
let them exult before God;  
Yes, let them rejoice with gladness.
- 68:4** Sing to God,  
sing praises to His name;  
Lift up *a song* for Him who rides through the deserts,  
Whose name is the LORD, and exult before Him.
- 68:5** A father of the fatherless and  
a judge for the widows,  
Is God in His holy habitation.
- 68:6** God makes a home for the lonely;  
He leads out the prisoners into prosperity,  
Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.
- 68:7** O God, when You went forth before Your people,  
When You marched through the wilderness, Selah.
- 68:8** The earth quaked;  
The heavens also dropped *rain* at the presence of God;  
Sinai itself *quaked* at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
- 68:9** You shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God;  
You confirmed Your inheritance when it was parched.
- 68:10** Your creatures settled in it;  
You provided in Your goodness for the poor, O God.
- 68:11** The Lord gives the command;  
The women who proclaim the *good* tidings are a great host:
- 68:12** “Kings of armies flee, they flee,  
And she who remains at home will divide the spoil!”
- 68:13** When you lie down among the sheepfolds,  
*You are like* the wings of a dove covered with silver,  
And its pinions with glistening gold.
- 68:14** When the Almighty scattered the kings there,  
It was snowing in Zalmon.
- 68:15** A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan;  
A mountain of *many* peaks is the mountain of Bashan.
- 68:16** Why do you look with envy, O mountains with *many* peaks,  
At the mountain which God has desired for His abode?  
Surely the LORD will dwell *there* forever.
- 68:17** The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands;  
The Lord is among them *as at* Sinai, in holiness.
- 68:18** You have ascended on high,  
You have led captive *Your* captives;  
You have received gifts among men,  
Even *among* the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell *there*.
- 68:19** **Blessed be the Lord**, who daily bears our burden,  
The God who is our salvation. Selah.



- 68:20** God is to us a God of deliverances;  
And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.
- 68:21** Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies,  
The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty deeds.
- 68:22** The Lord said, "I will bring *them* back from Bashan.  
I will bring *them* back from the depths of the sea;
- 68:23** That your foot may shatter *them* in blood,  
The tongue of your dogs *may have* its portion from *your* enemies."
- 68:24** They have seen Your procession, O God,  
The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.
- 68:25** The singers went on, the musicians after *them*,  
In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines.
- 68:26** **Bless God** in the congregations,  
*Even the LORD, you who are* of the fountain of Israel.
- 68:27** There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them,  
The princes of Judah *in* their throng,  
The princes of Zebulun,  
the princes of Naphtali.
- 68:28** Your God has commanded your strength;  
Show Yourself strong, O God, who have acted on our behalf.
- 68:29** Because of Your temple at Jerusalem  
Kings will bring gifts to You.
- 68:30** Rebuke the beasts in the reeds,  
The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,  
Trampling under foot the pieces of silver;  
He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.
- 68:31** Envoys will come out of Egypt;  
Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.
- 68:32** Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth,  
Sing praises to the Lord, Selah.
- 68:33** To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times;  
Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice.
- 68:34** Ascribe strength to God;  
His majesty is over Israel  
And His strength is in the skies.
- 68:35** O God, *You are* awesome from Your sanctuary.  
The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people.  
**Blessed be God!**



For the choir director; according to Shoshannim.

### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 68

#### 3.1 Outline

##### I. Prologue (vv. 1-6)

- A. Call to Protect (vv. 1-2)
- B. Call to Praise (vv. 3-6)
- II. The God Who Saved (vv. 7-18)
  - A. God's Procession – Sinai (vv. 7-10)
  - B. God's Protection (vv. 11-14)
  - C. God's Presence (vv. 15-18)
- III. The God Who Saves (vv. 19-31)
  - A. God's Preservation (vv. 19-23)
  - B. God's Procession – Jerusalem (vv. 24-27)
  - C. God's Power (vv. 28-31)
- IV. Epilogue: Universal Call to Praise (vv. 32-35)



### 3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1-6** Prologue
  - The first six verses of this psalm call on God to take action against Israel's enemies (vv. 1-2).
    - ✓ **v. 1** "Let God arise"
      - This Israelite cry originated as Moses' prayer when the ark of the covenant led the people in the wilderness (Numbers 10:25-36).
      - See Psalms 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 12:5 (Notes).
    - At the same time, God's people are summoned to praise Him (vv. 3-6).
      - ✓ **v. 4** "Whose name is the LORD"
        - "Yah" (or, "Jah") = short form of "Yahweh" ("Jehovah"). First used in Miriam's song in Exodus 15:2. This is its first of 43 occurrences in Psalms.
        - Compare "Hallelujah" ("Praise the LORD," 104:35).
      - ✓ **vv. 5, 6** "fatherless . . . widows . . . lonely . . . prisoners"
        - God always cares about and provides for widows and orphans. See Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27.
        - Singles ("the lonely") are those with no families of their own.
        - Prisoners normally refers to those who are imprisoned because of war, political disfavor, or injustice.
- The God Who Saved (vv. 7-18)
  - In this section of the psalm David recounts the exodus from Egypt, God's appearance to Israel at Mt. Sinai, the rainstorm that defeated Sisera, and God's gift of rain after the conquest (cp. 65:9-13).
    - ✓ **v. 8** "The earth quaked"
      - Reference to the Mt. Sinai event (Exodus 19:18-19).
    - ✓ **v. 9** "a plentiful rain"
      - Perhaps David intends the defeat of Sisera (Judges 5:4).
      - There are a number of parallels with the song of Deborah in this psalm (cp. v. 18 with Judges 5:12).
    - ✓ **v. 13** "the wings of a dove covered with silver"

- Every proposed interpretation is nothing more than a guess.
- ✓ v. 14 “the Almighty”
  - In Psalms the divine title “Shaddai” occurs only here and 91:1 (see Genesis 17:1; Exodus 6:3; 30x in Job).
  - Psalm 68 is rich in divine titles: *Elohim* 24x, *El* 5x (vv. 19, 20, 24, 35), *Adonai* 5x, *Yah* 1x, *Yahweh* 2x, *Shaddai* 1x, *Yah Elohim* 1x (v. 18), *Yahweh Adonai* 1x (v. 20).
- ✓ v. 14 “Zalmon”
  - Zalmon: a mountain near Shechem in northern Israel (Judges 9:48).
  - It is a blackened mountain (literally, “dark one”).
- ✓ v. 17 “the LORD”
  - Verse 16 is the first use of “Yahweh” since Psalm 64:10.
  - Only the third occurrence since Psalm 59:3.
- ✓ v. 17 “The chariots of God”
  - See 2 Kings 6:17.
- ✓ v. 18 New Testament Use
  - Ephesians 4:7-8.
  - Psalm 68 represents the people’s enjoyment of the benefits accruing from the Lord’s conquest. Paul uses the text with the same basic message.
- The God Who Saves (vv. 19-31)
  - God accomplishes for His people Israel what He performed for them in past history. David highlights this transition in thought by “daily” (literally, “day *by* day,” v. 19).
  - ✓ v. 19 “Blessed be the LORD”
    - This statement forms an inclusio for the last half of the psalm.
    - See verses 26 (“Bless God”) and 35 (“Blessed be God!”).
    - Psalm 68 ends like Psalm 66—“Blessed be God” (v. 20).
  - ✓ v. 19 “who daily bears our burden”
    - Therefore, He is “our salvation.”
  - ✓ v. 20 “escapes from death”
    - Both “deliverances” and “escapes” are plural in order to indicate repeated occasions.
  - ✓ v. 22 “Bashan . . . the depths of the sea”
    - Bashan’s mountains are the Golan Heights and Mt. Hermon.
    - These two opposites (the heights and the depths) express totality.
  - ✓ v. 24 “Your procession”
    - See 2 Samuel 6:12-19.
  - ✓ v. 27 “Benjamin . . . Judah . . . Zebulun . . . Naphtali”
    - Representative tribes: 2 from the south and 2 from the north.
    - Reference to Benjamin could be due to the lead the tribe took in the battle against Sisera (Judges 5:14; see, also, Zebulun and



Naphtali in v. 18), or because Jerusalem was located within its borders, or because Saul, Israel's first king, was from this tribe.

✓ **v. 30** “the beasts in the reeds”

- An allusion to Egypt. The reeds are papyrus.
- “The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples” is a metaphorical description of other rebellious nations.

• Epilogue: Universal Call to Praise (vv. 32-35)

- Returning to a call to praise (cp. vv. 3-6), David extends it to all nations. This is the climax to the universalism we have grown accustomed to in Psalms 56–67.

✓ Note emphasis upon the might and power of God in these verses.

#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 68

##### O Lord, Thou Hast Ascended

Tunes: “The Missionary Hymn” or “The Church’s One Foundation”  
or “Lead on, O King Eternal” or “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”



O Lord, Thou hast ascended  
On high in might to reign;  
Captivity Thou leadest  
A captive in Thy train.  
Rich gifts to Thee are offered  
By men who did rebel,  
Who pray that now Jehovah  
Their God with them may dwell.

Blest be the Lord Who daily  
Our heavy burden bears,  
The God of our salvation,  
Who for His people cares.  
Our God is near to help us,  
Our God is strong to save;  
The Lord alone is able  
To ransom from the grave.

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Sing unto God, ye nations,  
Ye kingdoms of the earth;  
Sing unto God, all people,  
And praise His matchless worth.  
He rides in royal triumph  
Upon the heavens abroad;  
He speaks, the mountains tremble  
Before the voice of God.

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All glory, might and honor  
Ascribe to God on high;  
His arm protects His people  
Who on His power rely.  
Forth from Thy holy dwelling  
Thine awful glories shine;  
Thou strengthenest Thy people;  
Unending praise be Thine.

— Author unknown

#### 5.0 Praying Psalm 68

- Almighty God, please take action on behalf of Your people. [v. 1]
- Thank You, Lord, for Your loving care for widows and orphans. [v. 5]
- Father, help me to be a bearer of the good news of Your salvation. [v. 11]
- I praise You, Lord, for bearing my burdens. [v. 19]
- Oh, God, what an awesome and powerful God You are! [vv. 34-35]

#### 6.0 Applying Psalm 68

- When God leads, His people follow, and their enemies flee.
- When God saves, His people must rejoice and praise Him.
- God's redemptive program extends to all peoples.