

Psalm Sundays

Text

Psalm 68

Topic

A song to celebrate the history of the Ark of the Covenant upon its arrival in Jerusalem

Title

"Ark Tales"

Strongholds of Men; strongholds of Elves; strongholds of Dwarves; strongholds of Evil.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy is full with them. Helm's Deep; Rivendell; Moria; Mordor.

Especially Mordor, also called The Black Land, and The Land of Shadow. It was the realm of the dArk lord, Sauron.

When Boromir heard that the plan was to take the One Ring to Mordor, to destroy it, he uttered these chilling words:

One does not simply walk into Mordor. Its Black Gates are guarded by more than just Orcs. There is evil there that does not sleep, and the Great Eye is ever

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watchful. It is a barren wasteland, riddled with fire and ash and dust, the very air you breathe is a poisonous fume.

There is a stronghold of evil in Psalm 68. It is named twice in verse fifteen, and then once in verse twenty-two. Bashan.

We don't immediately see it, both because we're not Hebrew, and because we aren't up on supernatural Jewish geography.

The Old Testament says that Bashan was controlled by two kings, Sihon and Og.

They both were associated with the ancient giant clans, the Rephaim and the Anakim (Deuteronomy 2:10-12; Joshua 12:1-5).

Og, for example, slept in a bed that was made of iron, thirteen feet long and six feet wide.

One scholar writes:

According to Jewish tradition, [this region of Bashan] was the location where the divine sons of God had descended from Heaven - ultimately corrupting humankind via their offspring with human women [as reported in Genesis 6:1-4]. These offspring were known as Nephilim, [precursors] of the Anakim and the Rephaim (Numbers 13:30-33). In Jewish theology, the spirits of these giants were demons (First Enoch 15:1-12).

Any mention of Bashan would remind a Jew of the Nephilim, and of a demonic stronghold.



What if I told you there was another stronghold in Psalm 68? Again, it isn't immediately obvious but, as we will see, it is the Ark of the Covenant, where the presence of the Lord dwelt among His people.

With that in mind, I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 God's Presence In Israel Prevailed & Will Prevail Against The Enemy**, and **#2 God's Presence In You Prevails & Will Prevail Against The Enemy**.

#1 - God's Presence In Israel Prevailed & Will Prevail Against The Enemy (v1-34)

The Ark of the Covenant, that amazing box that was in the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt among Israel, is definitely what this psalm is about:

- 👤 Verse seven hints at it, saying, "When You went out before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness..." The Ark preceded the Israelites on their journey.
- 👤 Verses twenty-four and twenty-five make it clear this song is about the Ark, "They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; Among them were the maidens playing timbrels."

William MacDonald comments,

This is Israel's national processional, in which the journey of the Ark of the covenant from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion is seen as symbolizing the march of God to ultimate victory. To the Jewish mind, the Ark rightly represented the presence of God; when the Ark moved, God moved. It is quite generally believed that the song was composed to celebrate one particular incident in the history of the Ark - the return to [Jerusalem] after its inglorious capture by

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the Philistines and after its stay in the house of Obed-Edom (Second Samuel 6:12-18).”

This song tells of the Ark’s march through the wilderness, into the Promised Land, to Jerusalem, then far beyond that to God’s ultimate triumph over the enemy.

The song has a six verse prelude.

Psa 68:1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. A Song. Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.

The first verse gives us a clue that the movements of the Ark in the wilderness are the subject. These are almost exact words which Moses used when the Ark first started off from Sinai, in Numbers 10:35.

Psa 68:2 As smoke is driven away, So drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

The power of the Ark is compared to wind and fire. The enemies of God were like smoke and wax. They never had a chance.

Psa 68:3 But let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.

“The righteous” is a name for believers. You believe God and He declares you righteous. He grants you a right standing with Him because of what Jesus did on the Cross: “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (Second Corinthians 5:21).

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A believer can therefore “be glad... rejoice... rejoice exceedingly,” knowing they are righteous, and that Heaven awaits after a relatively short time of trouble in this life.

It isn't wishful thinking to focus on the ultimate triumph of God and His people. The Bible is one book in which you want to read the ending first. We typically tell new believers, or seeking nonbelievers, to start by reading the Gospel of John.

Lately I've thought we ought to recommend they read the Revelation of Jesus Christ. At least chapters nineteen through twenty-two.

Psa 68:4 Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, By His name YAH, And rejoice before Him.

God's Old Testament presence was a cloud by day during the Exodus. “YAH” as a name of God first appears in the Song of Moses. Again, it is a clue that this a song commemorating the Ark's journey through Hebrew history.

Psa 68:5 A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

Psa 68:6 God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; But the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

Israel became a nation. The test of a nation is how it treats its most vulnerable. God intended Israel to show compassion to the “fatherless,” to “widows,” to the “solitary.” He intended them to free captives by converting them.

His promise to Israel was “prosperity,” both economic and emotional.



Economically; emotionally... Folks aren't currently (or should we say, COVIDLY) doing very well:

- 👤 Hertz Car Rental announced its bankruptcy; 17,000 employees are out of work.
- 👤 Suicide and domestic violence are increasing alarmingly. Australia, for example, says suicide is up 50%.
- 👤 According to a recent study, "A third of Americans are showing signs of clinical anxiety or depression, the most definitive and alarming sign yet of the psychological toll exacted by the coronavirus pandemic."

How are we doing? Hard to say.

But I did see this article, in the Christian Post: *"Nearly half of churchgoers say they haven't watched any online service in past 4 weeks."*

It is a time to be rich in faith, and to rejoice in eternal life in Jesus. Being out of fellowship will take its toll if we are not vigilant.

Psa 68:7 O God, when You went out before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness, Selah

Psa 68:8 The earth shook; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

God's creation responded to the march of the Ark. God's dealings with Israel are not some localized belief system. They are cosmic, affecting all the universe, and all mankind. They are momentous, magnificent. They are awesome and amazing.

In verses nine through fourteen, the Ark entered the Promised Land.

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Psa 68:9 You, O God, sent a plentiful rain, Whereby You confirmed Your inheritance, When it was weary.

Psa 68:10 Your congregation dwelt in it; You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor.

Psa 68:11 The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it:

Psa 68:12 "Kings of armies flee, they flee, And she who remains at home divides the spoil.

Psa 68:13 Though you lie down among the sheepfolds, You will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver, And her feathers with yellow gold."

Psa 68:14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it, It was white as snow in Zalmon.

When Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Ark was carried before them, leading the way.

The song describes changes in the weather patterns that brought abundant rain, greening the wilderness, to make it the land flowing with milk and honey.

The Lord "gave the word," meaning He was their military captain as the armies of Israel captured city after city from the enemy.

The Jewish women stayed back, secure, tending the sheep. Their victorious men brought home spoils. As they tried on the beautiful clothes and jewelry, they resembled "the wings of a dove covered with silver," or, when the light hit at a different angle, they gleamed like "feathers with yellow gold."

Enemy kings scattered like a snowfall.



I'd like to remind us that giants like Sihon and Og were deeply entrenched in the Promised Land. The main reason that Israel initially refused to enter the land, the one given by the ten faithless spies, was giants:

Num 13:31 [The ten spies said], "We are not able to go up against the people, for they *are* stronger than we."

Num 13:32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies *is* a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it *are* men of *great* stature.

Num 13:33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

If you think I'm making too much of giants, it might be because most make too little. There are more than thirty verses about the Nephilim, or the Rephaim, or the Anakim; and they are 'huge' in Jewish history. Bible commentators prefer to downplay their role.

The next several verses serve as an interlude as the psalm discusses victory over Bashan.

Psa 68:15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan.

Wait. If it is "a mountain of God," how can Bashan be an evil stronghold? The word translated "God" is the plural form of *elohim*. Bashan is "a mountain of *elohims*." You can verify that by consulting Strongs Concordance.

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The word *elohim* is **not** a name of the triune God. The word *elohim* describes a class of beings. All supernatural beings - God, archangels, Cherubim, Seraphim, the obedient angels... Satan, the fallen angels - all are *elohims*. All supernatural beings are *elohims*; but no other supernatural being is God.

Bashan is said to be "a mountain of many peaks." One of those peaks is Mount Hermon. One researcher wrote:

In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, Mount Hermon is the place where the Grigori ("Watcher") class of fallen angels descended to Earth. They swore upon the mountain that they would take wives among the daughters of men and then return (Enoch 6), an act corresponding to description of the Nephilim of Genesis 6, which speaks of sexual relations between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." ...Ridding the Earth of these Nephilim was one of God's purposes for flooding the world in [the days of Noah].

Psa 68:16 Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of many peaks? This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in; Yes, the LORD will dwell in it forever.

Clearly there is an unresolved conflict between those in Bashan and the Lord. "God desires to dwell in it" means He will conquer His enemies there.

The supernatural conflict was resolved by the Cross of Jesus. There Jesus triumphed over all agents of evil, once-for-all.

Psa 68:17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, Even thousands of thousands; The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.



This is likely a poetic rendering of the march of the Ark into Jerusalem. Bashan looked on, and could do nothing to stop the glory of the Lord from resting in the Tabernacle.

Psa 68:18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.

Despite the best efforts of Bashan, and the rebellion of the Jews themselves, God, by His providence, was accomplishing His plan to redeem mankind and creation. The Ark's arrival in the city God loves was a huge moment in the furtherance of the plan to redeem humanity, and creation.

The apostle Paul applies this verse to Jesus in his letter to the church at Ephesus. It is thus a Messianic psalm.

The Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven, is seated there in glory, and in power. It was another great victory brought to pass by the providence of Almighty God.

Psa 68:19 Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah

"Benefits" is not in the Hebrew. The Lord daily loads us. It could read, "the Lord daily burdens us." If you were here last week, we saw this concept in Psalm 55. It means God sustains us in our lot in life. Salvation is only the beginning of His work in us.

Psa 68:20 Our God is the God of salvation; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.



There is no other way to be saved but to believe the God of the Bible.
In Him alone can a person "escape from" the penalty of sin, which is "death" -
eternal, conscious suffering in the Lake of Fire.

Psa 68:21 But God will wound the head of His enemies, The hairy scalp of the
one who still goes on in his trespasses.

Psa 68:22 The Lord said, "I will bring back from Bashan, I will bring them back
from the depths of the sea,

Psa 68:23 That your foot may crush them in blood, And the tongues of your
dogs may have their portion from your enemies."

This is a song; it is poetry. This is a picturesque description of God's final
dealings with supernatural evildoers. One thing to glean: God will "bring them
back from Bashan" declares His intent to save mankind, who have been taken
captive by Satan.

Psa 68:24 They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God,
my King, into the sanctuary.

David comes back to the event at hand: The arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem for
the first time.

Psa 68:25 The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after;
Among them were the maidens playing timbrels.

Psa 68:26 Bless God in the congregations, The Lord, from the fountain of
Israel.

Psa 68:27 There is little Benjamin, their leader, The princes of Judah and their
company, The princes of Zebulun and the princes of Naphtali.

Psa 68:28 Your God has commanded your strength; Strengthen, O God, what
You have done for us.

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This reads like you are flipping through pictures taken at an event. Each tells part of the whole story.

Next the song jumps future, beyond even our time.

Psa 68:29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem, Kings will bring presents to You.

This is a future Temple, what we call the Millennial Temple.

It will exist in Jerusalem after the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth, to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth for one thousand years.

Psa 68:30 Rebuke the beasts of the reeds, The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples, Till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver. Scatter the peoples who delight in war.

Beasts and bulls; these refer to evil *elohims*. For example: In Psalm 22, the psalmist says, "Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me" (v12).

"Calves of the people" can be translated "flocks of people." It might refer to the armies of the earth who turn on Jesus at His Second Coming. In a sense, those nonbelievers are the flocks of evil entities.

"Till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver" would remind a Jew that, under the Law, a firstborn son is symbolically redeemed by silver coins. In context here, it is promising the Millennium as a time of salvation.



Psa 68:31 Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.

Psa 68:32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord, Selah

Psa 68:33 To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.

Psa 68:34 Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, And His strength is in the clouds.

Peace will prevail. Nations will come to Jesus, in Jerusalem, to kneel before Him with gifts. His glory will fill the earth as clouds fill the sky.

The Ark was lost to history before the Babylonian captivity. No biggie. Jesus is coming.

#2 - God's Presence In You Prevails & Will Prevail Against The Enemy (v35)

We are big on context when teaching God's Word. We don't want to read into the text something that is not there. At the same time, we benefit from having the full revelation of God. It gives us freedom to see things in the text that the original human author did not yet understand. It would be silly to ignore them.

I can't help but see **us** in the final verse:

Psa 68:35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!

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Without taking anything away from the celebration at hand, David explained that God was “more awesome” than His presence dwelling in the Ark. There is a hint that God wanted to dwell not just *with* His people, but *in* them. He “gives [us] strength and power.”

Jesus told the church, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). He then gave the church the gift of the Holy Spirit, a birthday gift, on the Day of Pentecost. (Which just happens to be today).

I came across a quote this week. It’s only four words, but insightful: “We are sacred space.”

Individually, and collectively, believers are the Temple - the “sacred space” - of the Holy Spirit. No enemy - natural or supernatural - can prevail against us, either now or in the future.

Let me share something that will encourage you. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus took His disciples to “the region of Caesarea Philippi” (16:13). It was there He uttered a favorite phrase of believers, “... I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (v18 KJV).

We typically think of Satan and his forces attacking us. But “gates” are not for offense; they are defensive. Jesus was describing His assault on the powers of dArkness and evil. He would triumph over them, and because of it, we are assured we will prevail.

Now here is the kicker: **Caesarea Philippi was located at the base of Mount Hermon, in the region of Bashan.**



His disciples would have understood He meant that He would destroy the enemy, and that they would prevail.

At the Cross Jesus “disarmed principalities and powers, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

The ultimate end of evil you can read about in the Revelation. Mean time... We prevail by taking up the Cross.

We prevail the way Jesus did: in humility, in weakness, trusting in the wisdom of God, preferring others more than ourselves, seeking to see that those held captive receive salvation.

