

Psalm 68

When we come each week to memorialize the offering up of Messiah, we consider his laying down his life for his friends. But we also consider events yet future, when he shall be in the earth once again. His Return will commence an epoch of judgment, marking the end of man's rule, and the authority of Israel's God being established in the earth. Psalm 68, which forms the second of our daily readings for the day (following The Bible Companion), is a song of praise which speaks of those times to come, with reference to days gone by in the history of Israel. It provides us with a glimpse into the future, from the overthrow of nations at the beginning of Messiah's reign, through to the glorification of Israel, and salvation being extended to the people of God (vs 20, 25).

The Psalm begins with God manifesting Himself upon the earth, and the different conditions that this will bring:

“Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him” (Psa. 68:1).

In the day of coming judgment therefore, the enemies of Yahweh shall flee in fear – but for the righteous, there will be life and peace:

“But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice” (Psa. 68:3).

The appearance of Yahweh Elohim upon the earth – as manifested in Messiah – shall be condemnation to the wicked, but salvation to the righteous. The idea of rising – as in “Let God arise” contains many connotations. There is the rising from a seated position for the purposes of judgment: “Yahweh standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people” (Isa. 3:13, see also Dan. 12:1). There is a rising out of sleep, and there is also the rising of the Sun at the commencement of a new day. This latter aspect, alluded to in Isaiah 60:1, is expressed in the prophecy of Malachi:

“But unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith Yahweh of Armies” (Mal. 4:2-3).

Notice the language being used here: the wicked being as burnt “ashes”, and the righteous being blessed, and used to judge the nations, trampling them under foot (see also Psalm 149:9).

In the day of coming judgement, it will be that Messiah will “wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one that goeth on still in his trespasses” (Psa. 68:21). This is referred to again in Psalm 110:

“He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; **he shall wound the heads** over many countries ...” (Psa. 110:6).

There would appear to be an allusion here, to an event in the history of Israel, which foreshadows the work of Messiah in relation to the nations. Judges chapter 4 recounts the situation where Israel were oppressed by their enemies, the Canaanites. Through the instigation of the prophetess Deborah, Barak led an army into victory over the enemy: “and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left” (Jud. 4:16). The head of the Canaanites, however, Sisera himself fled away to where he thought he could obtain refuge, in the household of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. He was wrong, however, and Jael destroyed him by wounding his head:

“then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it to the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died” (Jug. 4:21).

It seems clear that in these events, we are to see a pattern of events that foreshadowed the work of Christ. He smote the greatest enemy of all, even death itself. In their Song of Victory, Deborah and Barak sang:

“Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise Barak, **and lead thy captivity captive**, thou son of Abinoam ...” (Jud. 5:12).

As we shall see shortly, the highlighted words are used again in Psalm 68:18, which is in turn cited by the Apostle in Ephesians 4:8 and applied to the work of our Redeemer, in destroying the power of sin.

Genesis chapter 3, and the cursing of the serpent head is also very relevant in this context:

“and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; **it shall bruise thy head**, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Here, the greatest enemy of mankind is utterly destroyed through a fatal wound to the metaphorical head. The death-blow is descriptive of how Messiah, “through death” would “destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage ...” (Heb. 2:14-15). We shall consider the work of Messiah as portrayed in this Psalm shortly, towards the conclusion of our remarks.

The consequence of the Divine Arm of Judgment being revealed to the nations, is that the rulers of this world shall have their dominion taken away from them. They will flee in fear for those things that are coming upon the earth:

“... kings of armies did flee apace ...” (Psa. 68:12).

The prophet Isaiah also described how the lofty ones amongst the nations will be humbled:

“... the day of Yahweh of armies shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low ... and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up ... And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down: and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:12 14, 17, see verses 12-21).

Notice the description here of nations being like hills, lifted up. This is again spoken of in Psalm 68:16:

“Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in: yea, Yahweh will dwell in it for ever” (Psa. 68:16).

And Isaiah also speaks of the elevation of Yahweh’s chosen hill:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Yahweh’s House shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills: and all nations shall flow unto it” (Isa. 2:2).

Turning to consider the blessings of the Kingdom of Messiah, we find that as a consequence of the enemy nations being judged, Israel shall be elevated in splendour:

“Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers of yellow gold” (Psa. 68:13).

Elevating herself like a bird in flight, the people of Israel shall return to their land and their God:

“who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the Name of Yahweh thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee” (Isa. 60:8-9).

Psalm 68 describes how that because of the Temple being established in Jerusalem, the leaders of the nations will bring gifts in humility and supplication to the Great King:

“Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee” (Psa. 68:29).

These subject kings and nations are further described in Psalm 72:

“... the kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Sebah shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust ...” (Psa. 72:10-11, but see whole Psalm)

It is clear then, that as a consequence of Messiah reigning in Zion, the nations will have their dominion taken away (Dan. 7:12) and will prostrate themselves before Yahweh’s Anointed. They shall bring presents as tokens of their subjection, and bend the knee before the Great King, to the glory of Yahweh Himself (Cp. Phil. 2:10). Truly this will be a day of great things, and a time for lovers of the Truth to rejoice at the establishment of Righteousness upon the earth. Then their prayers shall be answered, and the Will of God will be done in the earth, even as it is currently done in heaven (cp. Mat. 6:10).

One of the features of the events that lead to the establishment of the kingdom of God in Israel, is the preaching of the Gospel to those who might hear and repent. This will be the work of a multitude of glorified saints; so it is written in Psalm 68:

“The Lord gave the word: those who bear the tidings are a great host” (vs 11, Brother J Thomas rendering).

In a similar manner to the way in which the Gospel was preached to the nations following the ascension of Messiah to his Father’s Right Hand, so there will be those sent to preach the Word when he comes again. This is a work of the saints “as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:15, see Isa. 52:7, Rev. 14:6). The Apostolic work will commence again, as described, but the difference will be that the message bearers will be immortal, and shall cause the laws of Yahweh to be obeyed. In that day, it will be that: “out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem, And he shall judge among the nations ...” (Isa. 2:3)

The work of establishing righteousness in the earth will be a process that begins with the judgement of the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). This will be the day so longed for by the believers down through the ages, who “look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

Very appropriately, the glorified saints are described in the Hebrew of Psalm 68 as “changed ones”:

“the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands *of changed ones*: the Lord is among them ...” (Psa. 68:17).

This militant power shall go forth as a united body of warriors preaching the Word, and executing the judgment written:

“ ... I that speak in Righteousness, mighty to save ... I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment” (Isa. 63:1-3).

Or as Psalm 68 has it: “That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same” (Psa. 68:23) - a very graphic depiction of what will certainly come to pass.

We made mention earlier to the way in which this Psalm points forward to the work of Jesus Christ, our Great Redeemer. We know that this is the case, for as we saw, the description of leading captivity captive is cited by the Apostle, and directly applied to him. He is the one who will lead captivity captive – or more accurately, it is a work of God through him. “what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ...” (Rom. 8:3). The work of condemning sin in the flesh this thus a work of Yahweh Himself, which was accomplished by the offering up of acceptable sacrifice by His Son.

Having overcome that which has the power of death, the Lord has authority over who will be delivered from the grave, and who will not. So Psalm 68 has it:

“He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto Yahweh the Lord belong the issues of death ...” (Psa. 68:20).

Notice that again, it is God who is the saviour: unto Yahweh belong the issues of death. But He has delegated this work to His Son, for He “hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man” (Jno. 5:27). Again, Jesus said of himself: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 23:18).

It is the Lord Jesus Christ then, who will determine those who will be in his Kingdom or not. The believers of the True Gospel come together each week to memorialise his death and resurrection, and these things qualify him for the work that lies ahead:

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1:18).

Messiah’s brethren are comprised of those who “love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), and earnestly desire his coming again. In this Psalm which we have briefly considered, we see many wonderful principles that will be enacted in that day. We have a vision of the future, considering the subjugation of nations at the time when the kingdom shall be restored to Israel. The judgments of the Almighty shall indeed be poured out when the kings of the earth shall be compelled to submit themselves before Omnipotent power. But for those who will be found watching for him, there will be innumerable blessings. Let us then look to the future with joy and gladness:

“let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to His Name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his Name Yah, and rejoice before him” (Psa. 68:3-4).

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