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For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David. A song.

PSALM 68: 1 Let God arise! Let his enemies be scattered! Let them who hate him also flee before him.

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The psalmist calls upon God to arise, bless his people, and scatter his enemies, Psa 68:1-3; exhorts them to praise him for his greatness, tenderness, compassion, and judgments, Psa 68:4-6; describes the grandeur of his march when he went forth in the redemption of his people, Psa 68:7, Psa 68:8; how he dispensed his blessings, Psa 68:9, Psa 68:10; what he will still continue to do in their behalf, Psa 68:11-13; the effects produced by the manifestation of God's majesty, Psa 68:14-18; he is praised for his goodness, Psa 68:19, Psa 68:20; for his judgments, Psa 68:21-23; he tells in what manner the Divine worship was conducted, Psa 68:24-27; how God is to be honored, Psa 68:28-31; all are invited to sing his praises, and extol his greatness, Psa 68:32-35.

In the title of this Psalm there is nothing particular to be remarked. It is probable that this Psalm, or a part of it at least, might have been composed by Moses, to be recited when the Israelites journeyed. See Num 10:35; and that David, on the same model, constructed this Psalm. It might have been sung also in the ceremony of transporting the ark from Kirjath-jearim, to Jerusalem; or from the house of Obed-edom to the tabernacle erected at Zion.

I know not how to undertake a comment on this Psalm: it is the most difficult in the whole Psalter; and I cannot help adopting the opinion of Simon De Muis: *In hoc Psalmo tot ferme scopuli, tot labyrinthi, quot versus, quot verba. Non immerito crux ingeniorum, et interpretum opprobrium dici potest.* "In this Psalm there are as many precipices and labyrinths as there are verses or words. It may not be improperly termed, the torture of critics, and the reproach of commentators." To attempt any thing new on it would be dangerous; and to say what has been so often said would be unsatisfactory. I am truly afraid to fall over one of those precipices, or be endlessly entangled and lost in one of these labyrinths. There are customs here referred to which I do not fully understand; there are words whose meaning I cannot, to my own satisfaction, ascertain; and allusions which are to me inexplicable. Yet of the composition itself I have the highest opinion: it is sublime beyond all comparison; it is constructed with an art truly admirable; it possesses all the dignity of the sacred language; none but David could have composed it; and, at this lapse of time, it would require no small influence of the Spirit that was upon him, to give its true interpretation. I shall subjoin a few notes, chiefly philological; and beg leave to refer the reader to those who have written profusely and laboriously on this sublime Psalm, particularly Venema, Calmet, Dr. Chandler, and the writers in the *Critici Sacri*.

Verse 1

Let God arise - This was sung when the Levites took up the ark upon their shoulders; see Num 10:35-36 (note), and the notes there.

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PSALM 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.

PSALM 68: 3 But let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God. Yes, let them rejoice with gladness.

PSALM 68: 4 Sing to God! Sing praises to his name! Extol him who rides on the clouds: to the LORD, his name! Rejoice before him!

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#### Verse 4

Extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name Jah - "Extol him who sitteth on the throne of glory, in the ninth heaven; Yah is his name; and rejoice before him." - Targum. בערבות baaraboth, which we render in the high heavens, is here of doubtful signification. As it comes from the root ערב arab, to mingle, (hence ereb the evening or twilight, because it appears to be formed of an equal mixture of light and darkness; the Septuagint translate it dusmwn, the west, or setting of the sun; so does the Vulgate and others); probably it may mean the gloomy desert, through which God, in the chariot of his glory, led the Israelites. If this interpretation do not please, then let it be referred to the darkness in which God is said to dwell, through which the rays of his power and love, in the various dispensations of his power and mercy, shine forth for the comfort and instruction of mankind.

By his name Jah - יה Yah, probably a contraction of the word יהוה Yehovah; at least so the ancient Versions understood it. It is used but in a few places in the sacred writings. It might be translated The Self existent.

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PSALM 68: 5 A father of the fatherless, and a defender of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

PSALM 68: 6 God sets the lonely in families. He brings out the prisoners with singing, but the rebellious dwell in a sun-scorched land.

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#### Verse 6

The solitary in families - יחידים yechidim, the single persons.

Is not the meaning, God is the Author of marriage; and children, the legal fruit of it, are an inheritance from him?

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PSALM 68: 7 God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness... Selah.

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#### Verse 7

O God, when thou wentest forth - This and the following verse most manifestly refer to the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness.

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PSALM 68: 8 The earth trembled. The sky also poured down rain at the presence of the God of Sinai— at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

PSALM 68: 9 You, God, sent a plentiful rain. You confirmed your inheritance, when it was weary.

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 Verse 9

Didst send a plentiful rain - גשם נדבות geshem nedaboth, a shower of liberality. I believe this to refer to the manna by which God refreshed and preserved alive the weary and hungry Israelites.

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PSALM 68: 10 Your congregation lived therein. You, God, prepared your goodness for the poor.

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## Verse 10

Thy congregation hath dwelt therein - חיתך chaiyathecha, thy living creature; τα ζωα, Septuagint; animalia, Vulgate; so all the Versions. Does not this refer to the quails that were brought to the camp of the Israelites, and dwelt, as it were, round about it? And was not this, with the manna and the refreshing rock, that goodness which God had provided for the poor - the needy Israelites?

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PSALM 68: 11 The Lord announced the word. The ones who proclaim it are a great company.

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## Verse 11

Great was the company of those that published it - המבשרות צבא רב hammebasseroth tsaba rab; "Of the female preachers there was a great host." Such is the literal translation of this passage; the reader may make of it what he pleases. Some think it refers to the women who, with music, songs, and dances, celebrated the victories of the Israelites over their enemies. But the publication of good news, or of any joyful event, belonged to the women. It was they who announced it to the people at large; and to this universal custom, which prevails to the present day, the psalmist alludes. See this established in the note on Isa 40:9 (note).

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PSALM 68: 12 "Kings of armies flee! They flee!" She who waits at home divides the plunder,

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## Verse 12

Kings of armies did flee - Rabin and the kings of the Canaanites, who united their forces to overwhelm the Israelites.

And she - Deborah the prophetess, a woman accustomed to tarry at home, and take care of the family; she divided the spoils, and vanquished their kings.

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PSALM 68: 13 while you sleep among the camp fires, the wings of a dove sheathed with silver, her feathers with shining gold.

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## Verse 13

Though ye have lien among the pots - The prophet is supposed here to address the tribes of Reuben and Gad, who remained in their inheritances, occupied with agricultural, maritime, and domestic affairs, when the other tribes were obliged to go against Jabin, and the other Canaanitish kings. Ye have been thus occupied, while your brethren sustained a desperate campaign; but while you are inglorious, they obtained the most splendid victory, and dwell under those rich tents which they have taken from the enemy; coverings of the most beautiful colors, adorned with gold and silver. The words בִּירָקֶרֶק חֲרוּץ birakrak charuts, native gold, so exceedingly and splendidly yellow as to approach to greenness - from יָרֵק yarak, to be green; and the doubling of the last syllable denotes an excess in the denomination - excessively green - blistering green. The Targum gives us a curious paraphrase of this and the following verse: "If ye, O ye kings, slept among your halls, the congregation of Israel, which is like a dove covered with the clouds of glory, divided the prey of the Egyptians, purified silver, and coffers full of the finest gold. And when it stretched out its hands in prayer over the sea, the Almighty cast down kingdoms; and for its sake cooled hell like snow, and snatched it from the shadow of death." Perhaps the Romanists got some idea of purgatory here. For the sake of the righteous, the flames of hell are extinguished!

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PSALM 68: 14 When the Almighty scattered kings in her, it snowed on Zalmon.

PSALM 68: 15 The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains. The mountains of Bashan are rugged.

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#### Verse 15

The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan - This and the following verse should be read thus: "Is Mount Bashan the craggy mount, Mount Bashan, the mount of God? Why envy ye, ye craggy mounts? This is the mount of God in which he has desired to dwell." The Targum countenances this translation: Mount Moriah, the place where our fathers of old worshipped God, is chosen to build on it the house of the sanctuary, and Mount Sinai for the giving of the law. Mount Bashan, Mount Tabor, and Carmel are rejected; they are made as Mount Bashan."

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PSALM 68: 16 Why do you look in envy, ye rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign? Yes, the LORD will dwell there forever.

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#### Verse 16

Why leap ye, ye high hills? - "God said, Why leap ye, ye high hills? It is not pleasing to me to give my law upon high and towering hills. Behold, Mount Sinai is low; and the Word of the Lord has desired to place on it the Divine majesty. Moreover, the Lord dwells for ever in the heaven of heavens." - Targum.

The psalmist is speaking particularly of the mountains of Judea, and those of Gilead; the former were occupied by the Canaanites, and the others by Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Amorites, whom Moses defeated.

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PSALM 68: 17 The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands. The Lord is among them, from Sinai, into the sanctuary.

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Verse 17

The chariots of God are twenty thousand - רבתיים אלפי שנאן ribbothayim alpey shinan, "two myriads of thousands doubled." Does not this mean simply forty thousand? A myriad is 10,000; two myriads, 20,000; these doubled, 40,000. Or thus: 10,000 + 10,000 + 20,000 = 40,000. The Targum says, "The chariots of God are two myriads; two thousand angels draw them; the majesty of God rests upon them in holiness on Mount Sinai." But what does this mean? We must die to know.

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PSALM 68: 18 You have ascended on high. You have led away captives. You have received gifts among men, yes, among the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell there.

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Verse 18

Thou hast ascended on high - When the ark had reached the top of Sion, and was deposited in the place assigned for it, the singers joined in the following chorus. This seems to be an allusion to a military triumph. The conqueror was placed on a very elevated chariot.

Led captivity captive - The conquered kings and generals were usually tied behind the chariot of the conqueror - bound to it, bound together, and walked after it, to grace the triumph of the victor.

Thou hast received gifts for men - "And gave gifts unto men;" Eph 4:8. At such times the conqueror threw money among the crowd. Thou hast received gifts among men, באדם baadam, In Man, in human nature; and God manifest in the flesh dwells among mortals! Thanks be to God for his unspeakable Gift! By establishing his abode among the rebellious the prophet may refer to the conquest of the land of Canaan, and the country beyond Jordan.

Yea, for the rebellious also - Even to the rebellious. Those who were his enemies, who traduced his character and operations, and those who fought against him now submit to him, and share his munificence; for it is the property of a hero to be generous.

That the Lord God might dwell among them - יהוה אלהים יהוה Elohim, the self-existing God; see on Psa 68:4 (note). The conqueror now coming to fix his abode among the conquered people to organize them under his laws, to govern and dispense justice among them. The whole of this is very properly applied by St. Paul, Eph 4:5, to the resurrection and glory of Christ; where the reader is requested to consult the note.

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PSALM 68: 19 Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burdens, even the God who is our salvation. Selah.

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Verse 19

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us - With benefits is not in the text. Perhaps it would be better to translate the clause thus: "Blessed be Adonai, our Prop day by day, who supports us." Or, "Blessed be the Lord, who supports us day by day." Or as the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic: "Blessed be the Lord daily, our God who makes our journey prosperous; even the God of our salvation." The Syriac, "Blessed be the Lord daily, who hath chosen our inheritance." The word עָמַסָּ amas, which we translate to load, signifies to lift, bear up, support, or to bear a burden for another. Hence it would not be going far from the ideal meaning to translate: "Blessed be the Lord day by day, who bears our burdens for us." But loadeth us with benefits is neither a translation nor meaning.

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PSALM 68: 20 God is to us a God of deliverance. To the LORD, the Lord, belongs escape from death.

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#### Verse 20

The issues from death - The going out or exodus from death - from the land of Egypt and house of bondage. Or the expression may mean, Life and death are in the hand of God. "He can create, and he destroy."

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PSALM 68: 21 But God will strike through the head of his enemies, the hairy scalp of such a one as still continues in his guiltiness.

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#### Verse 21

The hairy scalp - שַׁעַר קֹדְקֹדִים kodkod sear. Does this mean any thing like the Indian scalping? Or does it refer to a crest on a helmet or headcap? I suppose the latter.

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PSALM 68: 22 The Lord said, "I will bring you again from Bashan, I will bring you again from the depths of the sea;

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#### Verse 22

From the depths of the sea - All this seems to speak of the defeat of the Egyptians, and the miraculous passage of the Red Sea.

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PSALM 68: 23 That you may crush them, dipping your foot in blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from your enemies."

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#### Verse 23

That thy foot may be dipped in the blood - God will make such a slaughter among his enemies, the Amorites, that thou shalt walk over their dead bodies; and beasts of prey shall feed upon them.

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PSALM 68: 24 They have seen your processions, God, even the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.

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Verse 24

They have seen thy goings - These kings of the Amorites have seen thy terrible majesty in their discomfiture, and the slaughter of their subjects.

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PSALM 68: 25 The singers went before, the minstrels followed after, in the midst of the ladies playing with tambourines,

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Verse 25

The singers went before - This verse appears to be a description of the procession.

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PSALM 68: 26 "Bless God in the congregations, even the Lord in the assembly of Israel!"

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Verse 26

Bless ye God - This is what they sung.

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PSALM 68: 27 There is little Benjamin, their ruler, the princes of Judah, their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

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Verse 27

There is little Benjamin - This is a description of another part of the procession.

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PSALM 68: 28 Your God has commanded your strength. Strengthen, God, that which you have done for us.

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Verse 28

Thy God hath commanded - This and the following verses is what they sung.

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PSALM 68: 29 Because of your temple at Jerusalem, kings shall bring presents to you.

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PSALM 68: 30 Rebuke the wild animal of the reeds, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the peoples. Being humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations that delight in war.

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Verse 30

Rebuke the company of spearmen - חַיַּת קִנְהַי chaiyath kaneh, the wild beast of the reed - the crocodile or hippopotamus, the emblem of Pharaoh and the Egyptians; thus all the Versions. Our translators have mistaken the meaning; but they have put the true sense in the margin.

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PSALM 68: 31 Princes shall come out of Egypt. Ethiopia shall hurry to stretch out her hands to God.

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Verse 31

Aethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God - This verse had its literal fulfillment under Solomon, when Egypt formed an alliance with that king by his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter; and when the queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Solomon. But as this may be a prophetic declaration of the spread of Christianity, it was literally fulfilled after the resurrection of our Lord. There were Egyptians at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, who, St. Hilary tells us, on their return to their own country proclaimed what they had seen, and became in that country the ambassadors of Christ. The Ethiopian eunuch was one of the first among the Gentiles who received the Gospel. Thus princes or chief men came out of Egypt, and Ethiopia stretched out her hands to God. The words themselves refer to the sending ambassadors, and making alliances. The Hebrew is very emphatic: כּוּשׁ תִּרְיַח יָדָיו לֵאלֹהִים cush tarits yadiav lelohim; Cush will cause her hands to run out to God. She will, with great alacrity and delight, surrender her power and influence unto God. The Chaldee paraphrases well: "The sons of Cush will run, that they may spread out their hands in prayer before God."

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PSALM 68: 32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth! Sing praises to the Lord!

Selah.

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Verse 32

Sing unto God - All the inhabitants of the earth are invited to sing unto God, to acknowledge him as their God, and give him the praise due to his name.

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PSALM 68: 33 To him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which are of old; behold, he utters his voice, a mighty voice.

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Verse 33



Rideth upon the heavens - He who manages the heavens, directing their course and influence, he formed every orb, ascertained its motion, proportioned its solid contents to the orbit in which it was to revolve, and the other bodies which belong to the same system. As an able and skillful rider manages his horse, so does God the sun, moon, planets, and all the hosts of heaven.

He doth send out his voice - At his word of command they run, shed, or reflect their light; and without the smallest deviations obey his will.

Mighty voice - He thunders in the heavens, and men tremble before him.

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PSALM 68: 34 Ascribe strength to God! His excellency is over Israel, his strength is in the skies.

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Verse 34

His strength is in the clouds - This refers to the bursting, rattling, and pounding of thunder and lightning; for all nations have observed that this is an irresistible agent; and even the most enlightened have looked on it as an especial manifestation of the power and sovereignty of God.

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PSALM 68: 35 You are awesome, God, in your sanctuaries. The God of Israel gives strength and power to his people. Praise be to God!

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Verse 35

O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places - The sanctuary and heaven. Out of the former he had often shone forth with consuming splendor; see the case of Korah and his company: out of the latter he had often appeared in terrible majesty in storms, thunder, lightning, etc.

He that giveth strength and power unto his people - Therefore that people must be invincible who have this strong and irresistible God for their support.

Blessed be God - He alone is worthy to be worshipped. Without him nothing is wise, nothing holy, nothing strong; and from him, as the inexhaustible Fountain, all good must be derived. His mercy over his creatures is equal to his majesty in the universe, and as he has all good in his possession, so is he willing to deal it out, to supply the utmost necessities of his creatures. Blessed be God! The Arabic adds, Alleluiah!

The best analysis I find of this Psalm is that by Bishop Nicholson. I shall give it at large, begging the reader to refer particularly to those passages on which the preceding notes are written, as in some of them the analysis gives a different view of the subject. The old Psalter gives the whole Psalm a spiritual and mystical interpretation. And this is commonly the ease in the commentaries of the fathers.