

A MARCHING PSALM

Wednesday, May 9

Reading: Psalm 68

Psalm 68:24 *Your procession, God, has come into view, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary...*
26 *Praise God in the great congregation; praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel.*

The hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers” was never meant to be published. Its’ author Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, needed a song for the children of his Yorkshire parish to sing as they marched from one village to another on Whitmonday, the day after Pentecost. He sat up one night and wrote the words we sing today. He states that “it was written in great haste, and I am afraid some of the rhymes are faulty. Certainly nothing has surprised me more than its great popularity.”¹ His marching hymn has gone on to be popular among Christians around the world.

Psalm 68 is a marching song. It was written to be sung as the procession of worshippers marched to worship at God’s Temple. Perhaps it was written for that special day when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to its new home in the Tabernacle he had erected on Mount Zion in the heart of Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15-16). We can divide the psalm into four parts.²

OUR GOD IS COMING TO US (68:1-6). Verse 1 quotes the cry of the Israelites as they marched through the wilderness under Moses (Num. 10:33-35). It pictures God as riding the clouds to scatter His enemies and bring joy to the righteous, especially those who cannot defend themselves. God is coming to the aid of His people.

OUR GOD IS MARCHING BEFORE US (68:7-18). These verses trace God’s leading His people through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. It begins with their exodus from Egypt and their meeting with God at Mount Sinai (68:7-8). Then God gave them the Promised Land as their inheritance and drove out their enemies before them (68:9-14). It concludes with a picture of God choosing Mount Zion to be His permanent dwelling among His people, causing the other mountains symbolically to be jealous. As the Ark ascended to its home in the sanctuary there, the people envisioned God dwelling with them.

OUR GOD IS DWELLING WITH US (68:19-27). The blessings of God’s presence include Him daily bearing our burdens (68:19), salvation and escape from death (68:20), and the defeat of our enemies (68:21-23). These verses are followed by a detailed description of the people marching to God’s House to worship Him (68:24-27).

OUR GOD IS REIGNING OVER US (68:28-35). These concluding verses describe kings and nations that will come to worship and present gifts to the Lord. While this never happened in Israel’s past history, it will occur when Christ returns to rule and reign.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and applies it to Christ’s ascension into heaven and sending the gifts of the Spirit (Eph. 4:8). It is only because of Christ’s victory that we can cast our burdens on Him (1 Peter 5:7), receive salvation in His name, escape the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-18), and have victory over our ultimate enemy Satan (1 John 3:8-10).

¹ <https://www.challies.com/articles/hymn-stories-onward-christian-soldiers/>

² The outline is partly taken from Warren Wiersbe’s Be Worshipful (Psalms 1-89), p 213-215

THRU THE BIBLE Reading: 2 Samuel 16-18; Acts 4