

Psalm 68:2-11 A Bilingual Edition

John F. Hobbins

ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com

I think a case can be made for suggesting that a procession of God out into the battlefield, and sundry other events on the field of battle, are recounted in Psalm 68, which was, once upon a time, sung as accompaniment along the course of a cultic parade. In this cultic setting, the particular details of the victory recounted, which seem to relate to the Bashan region (the Golan Heights region and neighboring territory, in terms of current geography), like “the bombs bursting in air” of a well-known piece of Americana, become archetypal. They retain and lose their specificity at the same time. Ps 68 is a celebration of a victory seen as the final outcome of the theophany recounted in its opening lines.

The purpose of the following is to encourage appreciation of the Hebrew text as poetry. So as not to alienate the reader familiar with the received text, the Hebrew is presented in Tiberian masoretic dress. The phonology the texts instantiated in origin is a matter of reconstruction. That it differed from the phonology reflected in the received text is undisputed. As I show in the case of Lam 1 [elsewhere](#), a reconstruction of the sound and stress patterns these texts would have instantiated at the time of composition leads to the conclusion that they once possessed a degree of sonic coherence and orchestration far beyond that detectable in Tiberian masoretic Hebrew.

Vertical alignment of versets facilitates the observation of parallelisms. A verset of two to three stress units is given a line of its own, with stress units marked by the use of the *maqeph* like MT, but not always in accordance with it. Interstitial gaps of varying dimensions set off lines, strophes, and stanzas. An asterisk marks a text or vocalization at odds with MT, excluding differences of a prosodic or syntactic nature. Departures from MT of the latter kind are marked in the sense that MT’s neumes reproduced below occasionally clash with the construal of the text I propose. An introduction to the building blocks of ancient Hebrew verse is offered elsewhere: start [here](#).

The English translation attempts to furnish a global approximation of the poetry and prosody of the Hebrew, even if the results are necessarily piecemeal. I sometimes retain examples of enallage, chiasm, ellipsis, and inversion which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering. Differences in the use of blank spacing define stress units, versets, lines, strophes, and stanzas. Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation is intentional. By and large capitalization marks the onset of a stanza as defined in the [general rule](#).

The translation is designed to be read aloud, with the prosodic and rhetorical flow of the text marked by patterns of intonation.

Psalm 68:2-7

תהלים סח 2-7

Let God arise
his enemies scatter
his despisers flee before his face;
as smoke disperses, you disperse them
as wax melts before fire.

May evildoers perish
before God's face;
the faithful will exult
swell with mirth before God
and jubilate with joy.

Sing to God
set his name to music;
pave the way for the Rider of Clouds
ready it for YH
swell with mirth in his presence!

Father of the fatherless
champion of widows
God in his holy abode!

God who settles
the homeless in homes
who releases the captives to fertile ground
while opponents settle scorched earth!

יָקוּם אֱלֹהִים
יִפּוּצוּ אוֹיְבָיו
וַיִּנּוּסוּ מִשְׁנֵאוֹ מִפְּנֵי

כָּהֲנֵדָף עָשָׁן תִּגְדָּף
כָּהֶמֶס דּוֹנֵג מִפְּנֵי־אֵשׁ

יֶאֱבְדוּ רְשָׁעִים
מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים

וְצַדִּיקִים יִשְׂמְחוּ
יִעֲלְצוּ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים
וַיִּשְׂשׂוּ בְשִׂמְחָה

שִׁירוּ | לְאֱלֹהִים
זַמְרוּ שְׁמוֹ

סֹלוּ לְרֹכֵב בְּעַרְבוֹת
בֵּיה שְׁמוֹ*
וְעֲלוּ לִפְנֵי

אָבִי יְתוּמִים
וְדִין אֲלֻמָּנוֹת
אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲוֹן קִדְשׁוֹ

אֱלֹהִים | מוֹשִׁיב
יְחִידִים | בְּיָתָה

מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּכוֹשְׁרוֹת
אֶדְ סוֹרְרִים שְׁכֵנֵי צַחִיחָה

*MT has שְׁמוֹ

Psalm 68:8-11

O God, when you went out
at the head of your army
when you marched through Jeshimon,
the earth swayed
the heavens poured
before God
the One of Sinai
before God
the God of Israel.

Plenteous rain
you shed, O God;
your heritage, when languent
you sustain;
your fold inhabits it
you provide in your goodness
for the needy, O God.

תהלים סח 11-8

סָלָה
אֱלֹהִים בַּצֵּאתְךָ
לפְנֵי עַמֶּךָ
בַּצֵּעֲדֶךָ בְּיַשְׁמֹון
אָרֶץ רַעֲשָׁה |
אֶף־שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ
מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים
זֶה סִינַי
מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
גִּשְׁם גְּדֻבּוֹת
תִּגְיַף אֱלֹהִים
נִחַלְתֶּךָ וְנִלְאָה
אֶתְּךָ כּוֹנֵנֶתָהּ
תִּיתֶךָ יִשְׁבוּ־בָהּ
תִּכּוֹן בְּטוֹבֶתְךָ
לְעֵנֵי אֱלֹהִים

