

Psalms 68:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death.

Analysis

He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death. This verse proclaims God's sovereignty over life and death—He alone possesses the power to save and the authority to deliver from death. 'The God of salvation' (literally 'the God of salvations,' El moshaoṯ, אֱלֹהֵי מוֹשָׁאוֹת, plural) emphasizes God's multiple, varied deliverances. He doesn't just save once but repeatedly, in diverse ways—physical rescue, spiritual redemption, healing, provision, and ultimately resurrection.

The phrase 'unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death' uses two divine names—'GOD' (Adonai, אֲדֹנָי, Lord) and 'the Lord' (YHWH, יְהוָה). 'Issues from death' (totsaoṯ lamavet, תּוֹצְאוֹת מִלְּמוֹת) means exits or escapes from death—God controls the doorways leading out of death's realm. Only He can deliver from Sheol, resurrect the dead, or grant eternal life. This wasn't fully developed theology in ancient Israel, where understanding of afterlife was limited, but it anticipated fuller resurrection hope revealed later.

For Christians, this verse finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ's resurrection. Jesus is 'the resurrection and the life' (John 11:25), and through Him, God has delivered the death blow to death itself (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Christ holds 'the keys of death and Hades' (Revelation 1:18)—He controls death's exits. Every believer's salvation ultimately culminates in resurrection, the final 'exit from death' when mortality puts on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). Until then, we experience partial salvations—deliverances that point toward final deliverance.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite understanding of death evolved over time. Early texts present Sheol as a shadowy underworld where all the dead dwell, regardless of righteousness (Genesis 37:35, Job 3:17-19). This stands in contrast to surrounding cultures—Egyptians had elaborate afterlife beliefs, Greeks spoke of Hades and Elysium. Israel's focus was on earthly life, covenant blessings, and generational continuity rather than individual afterlife.

However, later texts begin revealing clearer resurrection hope. Isaiah 26:19 speaks of the dead rising, Daniel 12:2 describes resurrection to everlasting life or shame, and Job 19:25-27 expresses confidence in seeing God after death. By the intertestamental period, Jewish thought included developed resurrection theology (though Sadducees rejected it, while Pharisees embraced it, Acts 23:8). This psalm participates in this developing revelation—God possesses 'exits from death' hints at power beyond Sheol's gates.

Jewish martyrdom literature (2 Maccabees) developed robust resurrection theology as martyrs faced death trusting God would resurrect them. The psalms' language of God delivering from death was reinterpreted eschatologically—not just temporal deliverance from danger but ultimate deliverance from death itself. Jesus' own resurrection confirmed this hope and revealed what the psalmist dimly anticipated: God is indeed the God of salvation who opens death's exit doors for His people.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do you experience God as 'the God of salvations' (plural) in different areas of your life?

2. What 'death situations' (hopeless circumstances, relationships, dreams) need God to provide an 'exit'?
3. How does confidence in resurrection as the ultimate 'exit from death' affect your present trials?
4. In what ways do you need to trust God's sovereignty over 'the issues from death' rather than fearing death's power?
5. How can you live with the expectancy that Christ holds death's keys and no grave can hold God's people?

Interlinear Text

לֵאלֹהֵינוּ	לֵאלֹהֵינוּ	לְמוֹשֶׁעַ וְתֵי	לְמוֹשֶׁעַ וְתֵי
He that is our God	H0	He that is our God	of salvation
H410		H410	H4190
			and unto GOD
			H3069

אֲדֹנָיִם	לְמִן הַמָּוֶת	תִּצְאֹת:
the Lord	from death	belong the issues
H136	H4194	H8444

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:39 (References God): See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.

Revelation 1:18 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Samuel 2:6 (References Lord): The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

Isaiah 12:2 (Salvation): Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

John 5:21 (Parallel theme): For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

Revelation 20:1 (Parallel theme): And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

Psalms 56:13 (References God): For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Hosea 1:7 (Salvation): But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

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