

Psalms 68:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.

Analysis

Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. This verse calls for exuberant worship in response to God's mighty acts. The repeated command 'sing... sing praises' emphasizes joyful, musical celebration. 'Extol' (sollu, סִלַּו) means to lift up, to prepare a highway—it's the same verb used in Isaiah 40:3, 'Prepare ye the way of the LORD.' Worship prepares the way for God's presence, clearing obstacles and making His path straight.

The phrase 'rideth upon the heavens' (rokev ba'aravot, רֹכֵב בָּעָרָבוֹת) describes God as the cosmic chariot-rider who traverses the skies. This imagery directly confronts Canaanite theology, where Baal was called 'rider of the clouds.' The psalmist reclaims this imagery for YHWH—He alone controls the storm clouds and celestial realms. The heavens are His chariot, and He rides in sovereign majesty above all creation.

The divine name 'JAH' (Yah, יְהוָה) is a shortened form of YHWH (Yahweh), emphasizing intimacy and covenant relationship. While 'Elohim' (God) highlights power, 'Yah' stresses personal relationship with the covenant people. This name appears most famously in 'Hallelujah' (praise Yah). For Christians, this intimate divine name finds fulfillment in Jesus (Yeshua—'YHWH saves'), who makes the Father's name known (John 17:6). We rejoice before God not as distant subjects but as children who know the Father's name and delight in His presence.

Historical Context

The title 'rider upon the heavens' had specific ancient Near Eastern resonance. In Canaanite texts from Ugarit (dating to 1400-1200 BC), Baal is repeatedly called 'rider of the clouds' (rkb 'rpt), demonstrating his control over storm and fertility. For agricultural societies, control of rain meant control of life itself. By attributing this title to YHWH, the psalmist declares that Israel's God, not Baal, controls nature's life-giving forces.

This theological claim was revolutionary in ancient Canaan. When Israelites settled the land, they were surrounded by Baal worship and constantly tempted to hedge their bets by worshiping both YHWH and Baal (as the northern kingdom did under Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kings 18). Psalm 68 makes an exclusive claim: YHWH alone rides the heavens; Baal is nothing. Elijah demonstrated this dramatically on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-40), where YHWH sent fire and rain while Baal remained silent.

The call to 'sing' and 'rejoice' reflects Israel's understanding that worship is celebratory response to God's character and deeds. Unlike pagan religions that sought to manipulate gods through ritual, Israel's worship was grateful response to YHWH's gracious initiative. Music, particularly congregational singing, created communal identity—Israel defined itself as the people who praise Yah. This worship tradition continued in Judaism (synagogue services) and Christianity (early church hymns, Ephesians 5:19).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How can you cultivate more joy and exuberance in your worship rather than viewing it as duty?

2. What modern 'Baals' (false sources of security, provision, or life) compete for the worship only God deserves?
3. How does understanding God as sovereign over all creation's forces deepen your trust in His provision?
4. In what ways can you 'prepare the way' for God's presence through extolling His name?
5. How does knowing God intimately by name ('Yah') transform worship from formality to relationship?

Interlinear Text

לְרִכְבּ סֵל שְׁמִי זִמְרָה לְאֱלֹהִים שִׁירוּן
 Sing unto God sing praises by his name extol him that rideth
 H7891 H430 H2167 H8034 H5549 H7392

לִפְנֵי: וְעִלָּז שְׁמִי בִּיה בְּעֲרֹבוֹת
 upon the heavens JAH by his name and rejoice before
 H6160 H3050 H8034 H5937 H6440

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 33:26 (References God): There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

Psalms 66:4 (Worship): All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah.

Psalms 67:4 (Sin): O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.

Psalms 68:33 (Parallel theme): To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice.

Psalms 66:2 (Resurrection): Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

Psalms 18:10 (Parallel theme): And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.

Psalms 104:3 (Parallel theme): Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

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