

## **Psalm 68.19 June 2000.**

We have a short reading, make up by quoting from 3 translations of Psalm 68. 19:

- **“Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits”**, King James Version.
- **“Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden”**, Revised Version.
- **“Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up”**, RSV and ESV.

As I am sure you know, Psalm 68, like most of the Old Testament, is in Hebrew. Strange to say, each of the three renderings are perfectly legitimate and acceptable translations. The verb translated load or bear occurs nine times in the Old Testament, and can mean either to 'lay a burden' *on* someone or something, or to 'receive and bear a burden'. For example, it means "to load with something" when used of Joseph's brothers (after their discovery of the cup in Benjamin's sack; planted by the steward at Joseph's instigation) who "rent their clothes, and *laded* every man his ass, and returned to the city", Gen. 44. 13. This is sense adopted by the KJV. On the other hand it means to "carry/bear a load" when used by Isaiah, 'Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are *borne* (as Psa. 68. 19) by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb', Isa. 46. 3 (i.e. they were borne, in the sense of carried, from the very moment they were born). This is the sense adopted by both the RV and the ESV.

The historical setting of this Psalm of David is reasonably clear. It commences with a clear reference to the words of Num. 10. 35,] 'When the ark set forward, Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee'. Later Solomon used somewhat similar words when he brought the ark to the Temple on Moriah, 'Now therefore arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength', 2 Chron. 6. 41. That is, the expression is associated with movements of ark. It is likely that our Psalm was composed when David brought the ark from the house of Obed-edom the Gittite to Mount Zion (following Uzzah incident, they were blessed 3 for months), 2 Sam. 6. 12-19; its movement was attended/accompanied by gladness, by shouting, by trumpet-blowing and by David leaping and dancing before the Lord. His wife was not impressed! We can imagine that the procession began to move in verses 1-2. Then, in verses 3-10, the worshippers are exhorted to sing; to celebrate among other things both the Lord's march through wilderness, verse 7, and His majesty at Sinai, verse 8. (Note the sudden 'selah' in verse 7; not, as usual, at the close of a sentence or stanza. This indicates and calls for a pause, perhaps for a musical interlude, inviting the worshippers to consider verse 7 carefully. It is wonderful to note that He who rides upon the heavens, verses 4 and 33, once deigned to march through the wilderness with His people. Then, in verses 11-14, the singers survey God's victories over the kings of Canaan. And, probably as the ark was carried up the hill, they glory in the choice of Zion as God's dwelling-place, verses 15-18 (the hill where He desires to dwell, verses 16 and 18). On the summit, their attention turns from the past to the present and they sing a hymn of God's goodness and salvation.

Let us take the translations in order. **“Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits”**, KJV. That is, the Lord lays on us a load of good. This is most certainly true. 'It is of the Lord's mercies (*hesed; acts of loving-kindness; unfailing love*) that we are not consumed, because His compassions (*deep inward feelings; His pity and mercy*) fail not. They (*expressions ,tangible evidences of His mercy and compassion*) are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness', Lam. 3. 22-23. He is ever *faithful* and His mercies never *failing*.

This is true in the physical realm. James makes two relevant points in the first chapter of his epistle: (i) that **only** good comes from God (not evil; "Let no man say", God cannot be tempted and He doesn't tempt others, verse 13), and (ii) that **all** good comes down from God ('every good and perfect gift is from above; and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom no variation nor shadow turning'. He is always the same, He does not change, so we know He must be only and always good, verse 17. He gives to all (who lack wisdom) **liberally**, verse 5. This is the word used by Paul: **freely**/graciously, Rom. 8. 32, and **richly**, "Charge rich in world that do not trust in (*depend on*) riches but in (*the living, KJV*) God who gives, furnishes, supplies us *richly* with all things for our enjoyment", 1 Tim. 6. 17. He supplies food and clothing; health, home and many comforts.

We must surely acknowledge that we take so much for granted. And we do. Take example, something each of us will do almost 2,000 times in the course of this meeting. Listen to Paul at Athens, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He *needed* any thing, seeing He

*giveth* to all life, and breath, and all things", Acts 17. 24-25. He gives us our breath; on average we breathe 18 times each minute; that's 25,920 gifts every day. The Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread", Matt. 6. 11 Possibly this should be translated, "for the coming day" – and I can't be absolutely sure how to interpret His words; either as a morning prayer, or, if an evening prayer, for next day's supply. Whichever, the point is certainly that we need to recognise that God meets our basic needs every day.

How much more true this is in the spiritual realm; He positively loads with spiritual good/benefits. As see later, verse 18 is quoted in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 1 is a classic New Testament passage on spiritual blessings. I note that Psa. 68.19 opens and the Psalm itself concludes with blessing God, verse 35. Ephesians 1.3 reads, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places". What fabulous possessions are here. I much enjoy reading about that dramatic moment when, on 26 November 1922, Lord Carnarvon, his daughter and an assistant crowded around Howard Carter, an English Egyptologist, as he made hole in sealed doorway of the tomb of Tutankhamun and held his candle inside. It was the only shrine of a Pharaoh to be found intact in Valley of the Kings. Unable to stand the suspense, Lord Carnarvon asked "Can you see anything?" Carter replied with the famous words: "Yes, wonderful things"<sup>1</sup> - in fact he saw a gilded bed, gilded statue and other furniture decorated with gold. But it was only the beginning! What has the Lord Jesus introduced us to? "*Wonderful things*" indeed. There is no danger that we are ever going to exhaust them.

I have read that one morning R. C. Chapman of Barnstable was asked how he was feeling. "I'm burdened this morning!" was his reply. But his happy countenance contradicted his words. So the questioner exclaimed in surprise, "Are you really burdened, Mr. Chapman?" "Yes, but it's a wonderful burden - it's an overabundance of blessings for which I cannot find enough time or words to express my gratitude!" Seeing the puzzled look on the face of his friend, Chapman added with a smile, "I am referring to Psalm 68. 19, which fully describes my condition". How very true!

**"Blessed be the Lord ... who daily beareth our burdens"**, RV. That is, the Lord carries our load for us. It signifies "to take up a burden for any one and to bear it for him", F. Delitzsch. During His life here on earth, our Lord was the sickness-bearer, "That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases", Matt. 8. 16-17; quoted from Isa. 53. 4, "Surely He hath borne our griefs (sicknesses/diseases), and carried our sorrows"; afflictions of body and of mind. In the sense that He lifted them up and removed them. In His death, He was the sin-bearer, "by the knowledge of Him, my righteous servant shall justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities ... He shall divide the spoil (of victory after the battle) with the strong; because ... He bare the sin of many (His triumph would be an appropriate response and reward for His sufferings)", Isa.53.11-12; "who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree", 1 Pet. 2. 24; He intercepted the falling sword of justice which would have cut me down, and endured the consequences of my sins. One day in His kingdom, He shall be the glory-bearer, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord: Even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear (as Isa. 53. 12) the glory (the regal majesty and honour) and shall sit and rule upon His throne", Zech. 6. 12-13. Here and now, He is the burden-bearer.

But to get the benefit of His burden-bearing ministry, we must give heed to two other expressions of David. (i) "Commit your way to the Lord", Psa. 37. 5 (literally, 'roll your way onto Lord'; shake it off from yourself and roll it upon Him ... compare the use of the word, "roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave", Josh. 10. 18). (ii) Psa. 55. 22 = "Cast your burden onto the Lord" = "Cast on the Lord that which is given to you"; in context, your load of care and trouble. He will sustain/keep you; that is, He will nourish/provide for you – see Gen. 45. 11. The Septuagint refers to casting one's cares/anxieties"; as 1 Pet. 5. 7. Peter add the word "all", which is emphatic by its position. Literally, "it matters to Him". Archie Naismith tells of a Christian martyr by the name John Careless. In prison awaiting martyrdom, he wrote to a friend, "I have cast my care upon the Lord, and will be careless, according to my name". I much prefer to say *carefree* not *careless*, 1 Pet. 5. 8-9. *When we put our cares in His hands, He puts His peace into our hearts*. I need never fear that I am going to impose too great a burden on the shoulder which upholds the farthest galaxy of the universe. "Blessed be the Lord ... who daily beareth our burdens"

**"Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up"**, ESV. That is, the Lord carries us. "Who daily bears us", the Cambridge Commentary and the Century Bible.<sup>2</sup> Personally, I like the version, "Our Prop who supports us day by day", in Adam Clarke.

I refer back to Isaiah 46: 'Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne (as Psa. 68. 19) by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb. And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry (used only of great and grievous burdens) you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you', Isa. 46. 3-4. God's people could confidently lean on His strength. The context is interesting. Isaiah taunted the idolaters of his day, singling out two of the principal gods of Babylon ... 'Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth (these gods appear in names the *Belshazzar* & *Nebuchadnezar*), their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy laden (as Psa. 68. 19); they are a burden to the weary beast', verse 1 – they needed to be carted off as a dead-weight into captivity. When the idol was first made, 'they (the idolaters) bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble', verse 7. Isaiah contrasts "I will deliver you", verse 4. The prophet's withering sarcasm and scorn was directed at the *marked contrast between a people who needed to bear up their gods, which could not deliver them; and God who deigned to bear up His people, and who could and would deliver them.* Israel's priests may have carried up the ark to Zion, 2 Sam. 6. 13, but David in Psalm 68 was careful not to confuse the ark with the Lord – He daily carries His people.

We are probably all familiar with the devotional passage known as "Footprints". We see it often in secular outlets - available in many forms: pictures, posters, plaques, plates, bookmarks and various kinds of cards.

One night a man dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that although there were usually two sets of footprints in the sand (the one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord), at many times along the path of life there was only one set of footprints. He noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "lord, I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me". The Lord replied, "My child. I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you".

A nice thought maybe, but the truth is that the Lord carries us all along the beach – and does it daily. Indeed, "daily" is literally a double use of the Hebrew word for "day". Many translations adopt the rendering "day by day". The double use is probably for emphasis as is "peace, peace" (signifying "perfect peace") in Isa. 26. 4. Perhaps we could translate, "every day".

So we have three legitimate and fair translations, each conveying a great truth. But if I have choose, for my part, I am happy to go with Professor W.T.Davidson in the Century Bible - "*To load with benefits is gracious; to bear another's burdens implies closer sympathy; but to bear and carry the heavy-laden and suffering themselves is Divine!*". That is, "**Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up**"!

My text follows on from verse 18; "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men". quoted by Paul in Eph. 4. 8 in the context of spiritual gifts from Christ, "Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up *far above* (compare, 'set at His own right hand in the heavenlies *far above* all principality and authority, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named', Eph. 1. 21) all heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers". Paul saw a reference to the Lord returning to glory having conquered His foes - Satan, sin, death and hell. From there, He enriches the church with gifts. Yet it takes our breath away to realize that, in the present, the same ascended, glorified Lord Himself stoops down and (i) **day by day He loads us with blessings**, (ii) **day by day He carries our burdens for us** and (iii) **day by day He bears us up**.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lord Carnarvon's own description, 10 December 1922, quoted in: Reeves, Nicholas; Taylor, John H. (1992). Howard Carter before Tutankhamun. London: British Museum. p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Also early (Aramaic/Greek/Latin) versions - Aq., Symm., Jer. and Targ.