

*THE
BOOK
OF
PSALMS*

Psalm 8

0 To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. A Psalm of David.

- 1** O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!
- 2** Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.
- 3** When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
- 4** What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
- 5** For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6** You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your
hands;
You have put all *things* under his feet,
- 7** All sheep and oxen—
Even the beasts of the field,
- 8** The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.
- 9** O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!

Introduction

Title:

“To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. A Psalm of David.”

The title identifies the author as David. It is addressed to the Chief Musician, so it was meant to be used publicly. Several translations read, “On the Gittith”, rather than “On the instrument of Gath”. There are several different understandings of what the phrase means, but the most reasonable is that it refers to a musical instrument from Gath, one of five Philistine city-states, where Goliath lived.

Background

The commentators generally agree that David wrote this psalm in the early years of his life before he encountered many of the harsh realities he experienced as a warrior and king and before he suffered the guilt for several serious sins.

The psalm does not mention physical or spiritual suffering or call for deliverance from his enemies. The psalm is a song of praise to God from beginning to end, apparently motivated by David's contemplation of the magnificence and might of God revealed in creation and the startling wonder that God would pay any attention at all to man. Moreover, that God had "crowned [man] with glory and honor" and made man ruler over the created things on earth.

Psalm 8 is one of several psalms that are Songs of Creation. Psalms 33 and 104 are examples of these songs.

Background (Cont.)

From Psalm 33:

- 6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
- 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deep in storehouses.
- 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
- 9 For He spoke, and it was *done*;
He commanded, and it stood fast.
- 10 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.
- 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.

From Psalm 104:

- 5 *You who* laid the foundations of the earth,
So *that* it should not be moved forever,
- 6 You covered it with the deep as *with* a garment;
The waters stood above the mountains.
- 7 At Your rebuke they fled;
At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away.
- 8 They went up over the mountains;
They went down into the valleys,
To the place which You founded for them.
- 9 You have set a boundary that they may not pass over,
That they may not return to cover the earth.

Structure

As stated previously, the striking characteristic of this Psalm is that from beginning to end it is a song or hymn of praise. It begins and ends with exactly the same exclamation of praise to God. So, everything between verses 1 and 9 provides the reason for praise.

It is a very carefully structured poem that uses a literary technique call a “chiasm” to emphasize the theme. The chiastic structure presents two or more ideas in a pattern that reverses the presentation and repeats the ideas.

I found two slightly different diagrams of this structure in the commentaries, but both actually capture the same basic structure and express the same theme.

A. Ascription of Praise (v.1a)

B. The Glory of the Great King (vv. 1b-2)

C. God’s Interest in Man (vv. 3-4)

C’. Man’s Derived Glory (v. 5)

B’. Man’s Glory as Ruler (vv. 6-8)

A’. Concluding Ascription of Praise (v. 9)

OR

1. Praise to God in all the earth (v. 1a)

God’s glory in creation – the question of human worth
(vv. 1b-4)

2. Answer: crowned with glory –
responsible for creation (vv. 5-8)

Praise to God in all the earth (v. 9)

Theme

“God’s infinite goodness towards [man].” Calvin

“David, it is true, sets before his eyes the wonderful power and glory of God in the creation and government of the material universe; but he only slightly glances at this subject, as it were, in passing, and insists principally on *the theme of God’s infinite goodness towards us.*”

The psalm is an extended exclamation of the incomprehensible wonder, beauty, power, and mercy of God.

Exposition

A. Exclamation of Praise (v. 1a)

O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth,

- Most of the hymns in the Book of Psalms begin with a command to praise God. But, Psalm 8 begins “with an exclamation of praise spoken directly to God. The first word out of the psalmist’s mouth is *LORD*. No other hymn begins in this fashion.” (NICOT)
- As mentioned earlier, v. 9 is identical to v. 1 and everything between these two verses gives reason to praise God.
- Here, the psalmist shouts praise to the Lord for His excellence that is known throughout the earth. The exclamation mirrors truth we find stated frequently in the Bible.
 - Psalm 33:6, 9 that we read earlier, Isaiah 6:3, and Psalm 139:7-10 punctuate David’s praise here in v. 1.

A. Exclamation of Praise (v. 1a) (Cont.)

Psalm 33:6 & 8 - 9

- 6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
- 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
- 9 For He spoke, and it was *done*;
He commanded, and it stood fast.

Isaiah 6:3

“Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth *is* full of His glory!”

Psalm 139: 7-10

- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
- 8 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.
- 9 *If* I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.

B. The Glory of the Great King (vv. 1b-2)

^{1b}Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

²Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants

You have ordained strength,

Because of Your enemies,

That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

- In v. 1b, David exerts himself to give voice to a declaration of praise in which he attempts to express a truth of God that is inexpressible. The glory – or splendor, radiance, beauty, shining out – of God is everywhere at all times and cannot be contained.
- In Psalm 19:1-6, David describes God's glory as displayed in the heavens. There he writes,
 - ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
 - ² Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
 - ³ *There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.*
 - ⁴ Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
 - ⁵ Which *is* like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
 - ⁶ Its rising *is* from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Exposition (Cont.)

B. The Glory of the Great King (vv. 1b-2) (Cont.)

- The Jews had three concepts of the heavens:
 1. the atmosphere,
 2. the stars, galaxies,
 3. the place beyond the universe, where God particularly manifests His presence.
- David says that God's glory, the display of His Being, is both in and on them all and above them all.
- In v. 2, David connects the glory of God with the existence of man, which is the theme he develops in the rest of the song as the motive for unlimited praise to God.

B. The Glory of the Great King (vv. 1b - 2) (Cont.)

- David shifts his attention from the glory of God above the heavens to babes and infants through who God produces a “strength” that silences those who deny God’s existence and reject the evidence of His power, greatness, and glory.
 - In Romans 1:19-21, the Apostle Paul writes, “¹⁹ . . . what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”
 - David is simply saying that God has displayed His power and mercy to mankind by creating man and providing the means for humans to survive and to continue to exist. The miracle of human reproduction, the marvel of the female body that produces milk, the sucking instinct all display the creative genius, power, and provision of God.

B. The Glory of the Great King (vv. 1b - 2) (Cont.)

- In Psalm 139: 13-16, David echoes his reference in Psalm 8 to the amazing power and mercy of God in providing for human life. He writes:

¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

- God has assured the continuity of the human race to which He has given dominion over the earth. And, ultimately glorified humanity will fill the earth with His glory.
- David merely declares that a sober understanding of the source of human life and the provision God has made to sustain mankind will silence those who deny God's existence and reject God's authority.

Exposition (Cont.)

C. God's Interest in Man (vv. 3-4)

³When I consider Your heavens, the work of
Your fingers,

The moon and the stars, which You have
ordained,

⁴What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?

- In these two verses, David contrasts the glory, greatness, and power of God displayed in the creation of stars, sun, moon, and galaxies, with tiny, weak, and sinful man, and asks “What is man that God would give him any thought at all?”
- David has already proclaimed the glory of God that shines from the heavens at night. Now, he poses this question that lies at the heart of the reason for exuberant, endless praise to God from mankind that this song expresses.
 - Humans do not deserve any attention from God at all, especially when we consider the greatness, power, and glory of God displayed in the heavens. David asks, “What is man . . . And the son of man?”

Exposition (Cont.)

C. God's Interest in Man (vv. 3-4) (Cont.)

- David's language echoes the language in Job 25:6, where Job says, "How much less man, *who is a maggot*, And a son of man, *who is a worm*?"
- In Hebrew, the word translated "man" is "enosh" and means mankind in general. In the phrase "son of man", the word translated "man" is "adam" and one of the meanings is a man of low degree, a son of the first "adam". So, David seems to be asking "What are human beings and especially sons of Adam, the sinner, that You, the glorious God would even give them any thought at all?"

C'. Man's Derived Glory (v. 5)

"For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor."

C'. Man's Derived Glory (v. 5 Cont.)

- The Hebrew word translated "angels" is "Elohim" and can be translated "God", "angels", or "heavenly beings". The NASB translates the word as "God" and so does Calvin. In context, it is probably most accurately translated "God", since the point of verses 5 – 8 is to describe how wondrously good God has been to man by making man ruler over the ruler and, thus, giving man glory and honor that reflects the glory of God, who is the absolute rule of all creation. We are never told that God ever gave angels dominion over anything in creation.
 - This view appears consistent with the fact that man was made in the image of God and with the Apostle Paul's assertion that Christians will judge angels.
- The "glory and honor" God has given to mankind is a gift from God – man did not deserve or earn his status as ruler on earth.
- This "glory and honor" was present in an unpolluted sense before the Fall of man and was not only restored but fully realized in Jesus Christ, the perfect man. The elect will fully enjoy this glory and honor in the new heavens and the new earth.

B'. Man's Glory as Ruler (vv. 6-8)

⁶You have made him to have dominion over the works
of Your hands;
You have put all *things* under his feet,
⁷All sheep and oxen—
Even the beasts of the field,
⁸The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.

- In v. 6, David declares that God has “put all things under his [man’s] feet.” As stated previously, due to the Fall of man, not all things are presently under man’s dominion.
- However, God created everything for the good and happiness of mankind. Even after the Fall, the things of earth that provide the necessities for life and comfort continue in subjection and service to mankind. While David does not provide a complete list of all the things under the dominion of man, he gives examples of animal life that provide human beings with food, clothing, and labor.

Exposition (Cont.)

B'. Man's Glory as Ruler (vv. 6-8 Cont.)

- These verses contrast God's power and glory with the glory and honor given to man and emphasize the generosity of God towards man. This generosity serves as the cause or motive for amazement and praise of God.

A'. Concluding Exclamation of Praise (v. 9)

“O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!”

- After describing God's glory and declaring God's amazing generosity to man by bestowing glory and honor on him, David concludes by the same shout of praise with which he began.

Application

- 1) We should take time frequently to think about, or meditate upon, the wonder and glory of God displayed in creation. God has given us several psalms to help us do just that. When we think about the fact that God simply commanded the stars and the galaxies and our sun and moon and solar system into existence, that He made them out of nothing, we cannot help but be humbled and filled with amazement and thanksgiving that God loves us and has provided for us.
- 2) We should cultivate a habit of daily praise to God for His greatness and power and glory and for His generosity to us.
- 3) We should fill our hearts and minds with this attitude of thankful, joyful praise as we meet together to worship God.