

PSALMS

Chapter 138

Give Thanks to the LORD
Of David.

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; 2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. 3 On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased. 4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, 5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. 6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Ps 138 A royal song of praise for God's saving help against threatening foes. In many respects it is like Ps 18, though it is more concise and direct. Two (Hebrew) four-line stanzas (vv. 1–3, 6–8) develop the main theme; at the center a two-line stanza (vv. 4–5) expands the praise of the Lord to a universal company of earth's royalty. (CSB)

A psalm of David, who exults in how God delivered him from one of the many crises he endured. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, calling on the Lord; vv 4–6, kings shall call on the Lord; vv 7–8, the Lord preserves us. (TLSB)

The 138th psalm is a general psalm of thanks for a variety of deliverances from the enemies. The psalmist wishes that God's kingdom would come and kings would receive his Word and doctrine, give thanks for it, and worship him aright. They must learn that Christ's kingdom exists, that it sits on high, and that Christ's kingdom are stuck in woe and fear, and comforts and rescues sinners and the miserable. The psalm closes with the prayer that God not abandon his kingdom and work thus begun, but bring them to fulfillment in eternity. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

138 title This begins a collection of eight "Davidic" psalms (Ps 138–145): six prayers framed by two psalms of praise. (CSB)

As the first psalm of a group so often does, Psalm 138 forms a bridge between the preceding and following groups of psalms. Verse 8, "Your love endures forever," looks back to Psalm 136 and the preceding group. Verse, "the Lord looks down and knows," looks ahead to the content of Psalm 139. (PBC)

138:1–3 Praise for God's faithful love shown in answer to prayers for help. (CSB)

138:1 *gods*. Either pagan kings (see vv. 4–5) or the gods they claimed to represent. (CSB)

Hbr *'elohim*; could refer to angelic hosts or the deities of the surrounding nations. (TLSB)

138:2 *bow down* – Wherever they were, ancient Israelites faced in the direction of the temple in Jerusalem to pray. Cf Dn 6:10. (TLSB)

your holy temple. If David is in fact the author, reference is to the tent he set up for the ark (2Sa 6:17)—many psalms ascribed to David refer to the “temple” (see, e.g., 5:7; 11:4; 18:6; 27:4. (CSB)

your word. Especially God’s promises. God’s display of his love and faithfulness in his answers to prayer (v. 3) has made his name and promises more precious than all else that even a king may possess. (CSB)

In keeping His word of promise, God exceeded previous deeds done in His name (Ex 33:18–34:9). (TLSB)

138:3 *answered me* – God answered David’s prayer and gave him inner strength to deal with his trials. God promises the same for us. (TLSB)

138:4–5 The center of the poem: a wish and hope that all the kings of earth may come to join him in his praise of the Lord (see note on 9:1). (CSB)

138:4 *kings of the earth* – God, who is above all earthly authorities, will make Himself known to all nations and their rulers. This is a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles. At the last judgment, everyone will acknowledge the Lord. Cf Php 2:9–11; Rv 21:24. (TLSB)

words of your mouth. God’s grand commitments to his people. (CSB)

God’s Word preached by the prophets and written in Scripture. (TLSB)

138:5 *sing* – All kings will join in the worship and praise of God. (TLSB)

ways of the LORD – God’s words and his ways are in harmony, and together they display his great glory (see Ps 145). (CSB)

One way the Lord helps us overcome adversity is by giving us the necessary courage and decisiveness to deal with it. (PBC)

glory – God’s dealings with us demonstrate His immeasurable exaltation. (TLSB)

138:6–8 A testimony to God’s condescending and faithful love, concluded with a prayer. (CSB)

138:6 This verse is transitional; it serves both as a warning to the kings not to scorn David’s invitation to praise the Lord and as a comfort to David to continue to trust in the Lord. (PBC)

lowly – God attends those who approach Him in a spirit of repentance and humility. This is true even of the kings of the earth. (TLSB)

the haughty. Those who refuse to live in humble reliance on the Lord. They arrogantly try to make their way in the world either as a law to themselves. (CSB)

knows from afar. Already from a great distance recognizes them for what they are and so does not let them “see his face.” (CSB)

The arrogant can only know God at a distance. They have separated themselves far from God’s mercy. (TLSB)

138:8 *will fulfill his purpose.* God will not let David’s enemies thwart his divine purposes for anointing him king. But the Hebrew can also be translated “who makes an end (of troubles) for me.” (CSB)

Just as God has kept His promises in the past, so He will never forsake us and will bring His plans for us to fruition. (TLSB)

This is a good statement to remember in every situation. (PBC)

work of your hands. The king himself, whom the Lord had made. The Hebrew often uses plurals to refer to God or the king. (CSB)

We are God’s creation. (TLSB)

All things, even adversity, worked for David’s good. Whatever life may bring, the Lord will fulfill his purpose for us. (PBC)

Ps 138 God’s name and Word are above everything, including all of the claims of the false gods. He cares for His children, the work of His hands, and His hands will protect them and bring His plans for them to completion. God’s hand is against His enemies. David’s victories prefigure the victories of David’s Son, Jesus Christ, and the victories of those who have been baptized into Him. Salvation is not only for David or for the Israelites but for all nations who will come to faith through God’s Word. • O Lord, we thank You that in Your Word You extend to us such great promises. Grant us full assurance of Your grace, protection, and spiritual care. Fulfill Your purpose in our lives through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)