

PSALMS

Chapter 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.² Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Ps 8 In praise of the Creator (not of man—as is evident from the doxology that encloses it, vv. 1, 9) out of wonder over his sovereign ordering of the creation. Ge 1 (particularly vv. 26–28) clearly provides the spectacles, but David speaks out of his present experience of reality (perhaps on a bright, clear night when the vast host of the heavenly lights, stretching from horizon to horizon, erased from his musings small everyday affairs and engaged his mind with deeper thoughts). Two matters especially impressed him: (1) the glory of God reflected in the starry heavens, and (2) the astonishing condescension of God to be mindful of puny man, to crown him with glory almost godlike and to grant him lordly power over his creatures. (CSB)

References to the moon and stars make this psalm esp appropriate for evening worship. *choirmaster*. See p 993. *Gittith*. Meaning unclear; perhaps a musical instrument or particular melody. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, Your majestic name; vv 3–4, humankind seems unimportant; vv 5–8, the Lord gives dominion to humankind; v 9, chorus. (TLSB)

It is a Messianic psalm which presents Christ as the second Adam, the perfect man who is the exact opposite of the slanders and the evil rulers of Psalms 7, 9, and 10. When we compare Psalm 8 with the psalms which surround it, we see the sharp contrast between the glory for which God created mankind and the depths to which the human race has fallen. The glory the human race lost through the fall into sin can be regained for us only by Christ. (PBC)

8 title *For the director of music*. See note on Ps 4 title (Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself.) (CSB)

According to. Represents a Hebrew preposition of varied usage. (CSB)

gittith. See Ps 81; 84 titles. The Hebrew word perhaps refers to either the winepress (“song of the winepress”) or the Philistine city of Gath (“Gittite lyre or music”; see 2Sa 15:18). (CSB)

8:1 LORD. Hbr *yahweh*, the personal, revealed name of God (cf Ex 3:14; 6:2–8). (TLSB)

our Lord. Hbr 'adonai, common term used to address a king, ruler, or anyone in position of authority. The psalm begins by crying out the name of the one and only true God, then confesses Him to be our ruler. (TLSB)

David represents the whole congregation as speaking. The congregation acknowledges and extols the excellency of their Lord's glory as revealed to men on earth. (Stoeckhardt)

name. The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. It has no separate existence apart from the Lord, but is synonymous with the Lord himself in his gracious manifestation and accessibility to his people. Hence the Jerusalem temple is the earthly residence of his name among his people (see 74:7; Dt 12:5, 11; 2Sa 7:13), and his people can pray to him by calling on his name (see 79:6; 80:18; 99:6; 105:1; 116:4, 13, 17). The name of the Lord protects (see 20:1; Pr 18:10); the Lord saves by his name (see 54:1); and his saving acts testify that his name is near (see 52:9). Accordingly, the godly "trust in" his name (20:7; 33:21), hope in his name (see 52:9), "sing praise" to his name (7:17; 9:2; 18:49) and "rejoice in" his name (89:16). Both the "love" and the "fear" that belong alone to God are similarly directed toward his name.) (CSB)

In a twofold manner God has made Himself known and revealed His glory viz., in the works of creation, and the works of salvation, in the realm of power and in realm of grace. (Stoeckhardt)

majestic. The name of Yahweh is rightfully described. Yahweh alone is, always has been, and always will be the one who exists and, by extension, is always present to act on behalf of humankind for our salvation. (TLSB)

glory. God's majesty is tangibly revealed on earth in the wonderful details and design of creation (esp in Christ's human nature and work) and extends beyond our view into the heavens. (TLSB)

The mighty God, whose glory is displayed across the face of the heavens, appoints (and evokes) the praise of little children to silence the dark powers arrayed against him (for a NT application see Mt 21:16). – More precious than the testimony of huge galaxies are the simple prayers and songs of a little child. (PBC)

8:2 babies and infants ... established strength. God's majesty and glory are found throughout the created order. They are most clearly and personally displayed in the incarnation of His Son and the reconciliation of humankind through the Holy Child, Jesus. This is God's most glorious and majestic work, but it is also a paradox. Luther: "This is the way Christ's kingdom is established, namely, not with human force, wisdom, counsel or power, but with the Word and the Gospel preached by infants and sucklings.... By 'infants' He does not mean young children who cannot talk ... but plain, simple, unsophisticated people, who are like infant children in that they set aside all reason, grasp and accept the Word with simple faith, and let themselves be led and directed by God like children. Such people are also the best scholars and pupils in Christ's kingdom" (AE 12:108). "Children should be constantly urged and moved to honor God's name and to have it always upon their lips for everything that may happen to them" (LC I 70). (TLSB)

So secure is the honor of the name of the Lord that in the full consciousness of his great glory he has let the defense of his honor be committed to babes. There are other forces that can and do take up the defense of his name, but as far as the Lord is concerned, he can be content with what the mouths of babes can utter. (Leupold)

It should be noted that the psalmist does not only claim that God has ordained praise out of the mouth of these little ones, but he asserts that God out of their mouth has established might, power, and strength. These little babes with their lisping tongues exert a tremendous power for God. AS they raise their lisping voices in prayers which touch upon the mighty name of God, they receive strength to accomplish great things. Outwardly or in themselves they have no power, but as they inwardly take hold of God's name, they wield a tremendous power, God's own power. (Stoeckhardt)

avenger. See 44:16; one who strikes back in malicious revenge (not as in 9:12). (CSB)

God uses the words of infants “to stop” “cause to cease” (from s.v. Ps. 46:9). Here, then, in God's glorious creation, and under his sovereign majesty, the enemies of God exist and pose a threat to the righteous, especially the vulnerable. But God will bring the wicked to their end; and that victory will be a triumph of faith, no matter how small and simple the acknowledgment of God's power may be. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

8:3–5 The vastness and majesty of the heavens as the handiwork of God (see 19:1–6; 104:19–23) evoke wonder for what their Maker has done for little man, who is here today and gone tomorrow (see 144:3–4). (See Job 7:17–21 for Job's complaint that God takes man too seriously.) (CSB)

For God the work of creating huge galaxies was detailed finger-work, like fine needlepoint. We might think that the creation of mankind was even more trivial, since the whole human race is nothing but a microscopic speck compared to just one of God's stars. Yet God created Adam and Eve to have dominion over the universe. He created the sun, moon and stars to serve them. He created man and woman in his image so that they could be righteous and holy and live in happy fellowship with him. (PBC)

8:3 *fingers.* A concise and colorful figure of speech referring to God's miraculous power (see 31:18; Ps 8:3). Jesus drove out demons “by the finger of God” (Lk 11:20). Cf. the similar use of the phrase “hand of the LORD” in 9:3.) (CSB)

The psalmist sees all of creation as God's finger work, the work of the divine craftsman. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The “fingers” of God express in a sensitive manner his care as a sculptor. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Moon and stars – The fact that the psalmist mentions only the moon and the stars may indicate that the psalmist was observing the night sky. Even if that is the case, the conclusion is still over whelming – God is so majestic and powerful that he is could create all of these things by a powerful decree. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

8:4–6 Heb 2:6–8, quoting the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), applies these verses to Jesus, who as the incarnate Son of God is both the representative man and the one in whom man's appointed destiny will be fully realized. The author of Hebrews thus makes use of the eschatological implications of these nonprophetic words in his testimony to Christ. Paul does the same with v. 6 in 1Co 15:27 (see also Eph 1:22). (CSB)

8:4 *what.* The Hebrew for this word is translated “how” in vv. 1, 9 and begins the line that serves as the center of the psalm. (CSB)

David considers the place of human beings in the created order and, more important, their significance to God. (TLSB)

How is it possible that he who made the vast heavens and all that appears on the face of them, whether it be by day or night, should ever have busied himself with the being called “mortal,” so as either to “consider” him or even in any way to “care for him?” (Leupold)

Man – The descriptions are of humans, people in general, and not of males as opposed to females; they portray humans as frail and insignificant, especially when placed in the context of the expansive universe. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

are mindful of. Lit. “remember” God had not forgotten Noah and his family. To “remember” in the Bible is not merely to recall to mind; it is to express concern for someone, to act with loving care for him. When God remembers his people, he does so “with favor” (Ne 5:19; 13:31). (CSB)

son of man. Often a poetic synonym for “man” (see 80:17; 144:3). A term used 93 times in Ezekiel, emphasizing the prophet’s humanity as he was addressed by the transcendent God. Da 7:13 and 8:17 are the only other places where the phrase is used as a title in the OT. Jesus’ frequent use of the phrase in referring to himself showed that he was the eschatological figure spoken of in Da 7:13. (CSB)

Hbr *ben ’adam*, “son of Adam.” Human beings enjoy a special relationship with their Creator. Vv 5–8 explain the special status and role that human beings enjoy over the rest of creation. (TLSB)

8:5 Emphasizes the special status God bestows on humans who enjoy His care and attention. Luther translates: “Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while,” and applies the passage to Christ (AE 12:124). (TLSB)

heavenly beings. The exalted angelic creatures that surround God in his heavenly realm (as, e.g., in Isa 6:2). (CSB)

Hbr *’elohim*, “God,” or “divine beings.” The LXX identifies them as angels (cf Heb 2:5, 7). (TLSB)

During His stay on earth Jesus did not look like God or even like an angel, but like an ordinary man. (PBC)

8:6–8 See Ge 1:26–27. Man’s rule is real—a part of his “glory and honor” (v. 5)—and it is his destiny (the eschatological import drawn on by Paul and the author of Hebrews. But it is not absolute or independent. It is participation, as a subordinate, in God’s rule; and it is a gift, not a right. (CSB)

8:6 *dominion.* Gn 1:26–27 refers to the inborn duty of human beings to rule over creation. (TLSB)

Here it is a word that stresses mastery and ruler-ship (s.v. Ps. 66:7). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

works. Or, created ones, possibly referring to the heavenly beings (v 5). Though human beings have been given an extraordinary responsibility and great authority, David reminds us that

creation is the work of God's hands. Thus, human beings see themselves as God's humble and responsible servants in their role as rulers over creation. (TLSB)

8:7 *sheep...beasts of the field* – These works of God's hand that were put under the dominion of mankind. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

8:8 *paths of the seas*. Currents in the oceans used by sailors as trade routes. (TLSB)

8:9 Repeated verbatim from v. 1a. (CSB)

Ps 8 Luther: "David concludes this psalm just the way he began it. He thanks the Lord, our Ruler, for His great and inestimable blessing, for establishing such a kingdom and calling and gathering His church, which gloriously praises His name throughout the world and thanks Him in heaven. Let us follow the example of this singer of praises as he prophesies to us. The Lord is our Ruler, too, and His kingdom is established and founded from the mouths of babes and sucklings. We entered it by Baptism, and we are called to it daily through Word and Gospel. With David we also hope to come to where we shall see the heavens, the work of His fingers, the moon and the stars which He will prepare. He won the kingdom with great trouble and anguish. Now He is crowned with honor and adornment and has everything under His feet. For this we give God our praise and thanks, but especially for the fact that He has brought us to a light and knowledge that does not spring up out of human reason but out of Christ. He is our Sun, who died for us and was raised from the dead, lives and reigns, so that through Him we might be saved. To this end may God help us all. Amen. Glory to God alone" (AE 12:135–36). (TLSB)