



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 8: Psalm 8

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Summary:

Psalm 8 shows the universal harmony of the entire creation under the sovereign reign of God through the reign of the Son of Adam upon the earth.

Outline

1. 1-2 The Majesty of God
2. 3-8 The Glory of Man
3. 9 The Majesty of God

OBSERVATION

Psalm 8 was written by David. The superscription ascribes it to him. No occasion is mentioned. It is directed to the choirmaster, or the chief musician. The term *gittith* most likely refers to a musical instrument. The Targum, an Aramaic paraphrase translation of the Tanak, has the phrase rendered: *upon the harp which was brought from Gath*. If this is accurate, the instrument was a type of harp that may have been an historic precursor to the modern guitar. Another possibility comes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanak. A similar word to *gittith* in Hebrew means winepress, so the Septuagint has: *for the winepresses*. This is consistent with the thought the psalm was composed, or used, in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. The text of the psalm seems to make a musical instrument more likely as accompaniment for this hymn of praise.

Psalm 8 is a praise psalm. The prototypical praise psalm includes, 1) a call to praise, 2) a catalog of praiseworthy works and character of God, and 3) a closing prayer or petition. Psalm 8 doesn't exactly conform to the conventional praise form, as there is no call to praise and no closing prayer. It does have a catalog of praiseworthy attributes and works of God.

I categorize this psalm as pure praise. David doesn't ask God for anything, or ask him to do anything. The psalm doesn't command or even suggest that people do anything. The psalm is like a fulfillment of the last phrase of Psalm 7:17, where David vows to praise the name of the LORD Most High. So praise is the main type and its subtype is nature, or creation, because of the references to creation and God's work as Creator.

Psalm 8 is perhaps the most theologically rich and robust psalm we have encountered yet. It is closely related to Psalm 2 in subject matter. Psalm 8 mostly differs from Psalm 2 in that Psalm 8 is much grander in scope.

Walk Through Psalm 8

Verse 1 begins the psalm with direct address to God, which is maintained throughout the psalm. The name LORD in all uppercase letters is the Hebrew *Yahweh*, God's covenant name. The lowercase Lord is the word *Adon*, which means master or ruler. We might say David is saying, O God of the covenant, You are the Sovereign Master of your people. God's excellence, or power, is evident throughout the earth. His glory, or his majesty, is above the heavens. So God's reign is over all his creation from the earth to the third heaven. This describes his universal kingdom.

Verse 2 gives a contrast between babes and sucklings, which images weakness, with strength established. God brings strength out of weakness, or he confound the strong with weakness, or the weak. Further, God does this to still, or cause to cease or fail, his enemies.

In verse 3, David considers the scope of creation. He is looking beyond the earth and the night sky reveals the stars and moon. There could be a subtle play here on the contrast between dark and light. David refers to the work of God's fingers and later, the work of God's hands (6). The reference to fingers suggest precision and delicate work. God's design and care of his creation is suggested, down to the infinitely small parts. The imagery gives us a contrast in sizes by comparison. David is upon earth, which is considerably larger than he is. He is looking to the heavens, which are even larger than the earth. He considers the large heavens as the work of God's fingers, seeing God as infinitely larger than the heavens, earth, and man. The imagery sets up the question in the next lines.

Verse 4 shows man as the contemplative creature on earth. God remembers and visits man on the earth. This speaks to God's care and provision for man. It makes us think of the giving of the ordering of creation to sustain mankind's life. God gave seasons, the sun and the rain, and the seed time to harvest cycle. Man has a particular place in creation as the creation of God's hands. It reminds of us other psalm statements, such as, "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3). The contemplation is humbling.

In verse 5, man has an elevated place in the creation. He is lower than angels, but yet he has been crowned with glory and honor. These are terms of rule and dominion. The word for glory is *kavod*, which we have already seen applied to kingship in Psalm 3:3; 4:2; and 7:5.

In verses 6-8, the kingdom of the earth has been put under the feet of man. He is given dominion. These verses echo Genesis 1:26-28 strongly. The references to animals, birds, and fish are representative to encompass the natural world throughout the entire earth. The rule of the earth had been mediated to man from God.

Verse 9 repeats the first phrase of verse 1. This is pure praise of God. The structure of the psalm has man and earth in the middle of this psalm and the majesty of God encircling man and the kingdom of the earth. God's universal kingdom encompasses all his creation and he has mediated the kingdom of the earth to man.

INTERPRETATION

What does Psalm 8 teach?

The Reign of Adam

Psalm 8 has a number of important connections with other parts of the Bible. For instance, the New Testament writers consistently used this psalm as prophecy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:16; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:6-8). The psalm has important connections with prior revelation in the Old Testament as well. We will focus on these connections to find the meaning of this psalm.

The most obvious connection in this psalm is verses 6-8 to Genesis 1:26-28. The words for *man*, *son of man*, and the pronoun *him* are all singular. Genesis 1:26-28 recounts man being made in the image and likeness of God and given dominion over all the earth, including the people that Adam and Eve would fill the earth with. Psalm 8:5 describes that as being crowned with glory. In other words, the first man, Adam, was made king over the kingdom of the earth. He failed at this job through sin and brought a curse upon the earth and death upon the human race.

The words *man* and *son of man* in verse 4 also have interesting connections with early chapters in Genesis. The phrase *son of man* is from the Hebrew *ben adam* and is literally son of Adam. Genesis 2 tells us man was called Adam, *adam*, because he was taken out of *adama*, the earth or ground. The word for *man* is different. It is the Hebrew *enosh*, which is another word for man that includes the idea of weakness or frailty. The son of Seth in Genesis 5:7 was named Enosh, or Enos, making him a son of Adam as well.

These connections take us beyond Genesis 1 to Genesis 5, so we read Psalm 8 in the setting of the early chapters of Genesis. These chapters include creation, fall, and promise of redemption. Psalm 8:2 refers to weakness and overcoming enemies. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, the enemy. The woman in the garden was called woman, *ishah*, because she was taken out of man, *ish*. So, the seed of the woman is the son of Adam.

The presence of enemies in Psalm 8 seems puzzling until we read this psalm with the early chapters of Genesis. Enemies in this psalm refers to an imbalance in the harmony of God's universal kingdom and the mediated kingdom of the earth. This psalm is eschatological in looking to the silencing of enemies (2) and subjection of the entire earth (6-8) to the crowned Son of Adam ruling over the kingdom of the earth (4-5).

Messianic Hope

The New Testament connections with Psalm 8 support this interpretation of the psalm with its Genesis connections. Matthew 21:16 quotes Psalm 8:2 in reference to the cries of "Hosanna" as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem before his crucifixion. 1 Corinthians 15:27 refers to Psalm 8:6 in reference to Christ's Messianic reign over the kingdom of the earth as a result of undoing the death brought by the first Adam by Christ's resurrection. (See also Romans

5:12-21 in reference to the first and second Adam). Ephesians 1:22 is similar to 1 Corinthians 15:27. Hebrews 2:6-8 quote this psalm in direct reference to Jesus Christ. Hebrews 2:9 applies it to his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Also, the Son of Man was a favored title by Jesus in the Gospels, and it is also used of the Messiah in Daniel 7:14.

The New Testament references to this psalm are used in connection with the death of Jesus, but what of the death of the Son of Adam in this Psalm? There doesn't seem to be any reference to death of the Son of Adam in this psalm. The wording of Psalm 8:4 is very close to statements Job made in Job 7:17-18. At first glance, the passage in Job doesn't seem to parallel with Psalm 8. Job is speaking of God's intimate involvement over and with his creation in the context. Psalm 8 reflects that view with references to the work of God's fingers and hands and references to the heavens all the way down to the fish of the sea.

Job's chapter ends in Job 7:21, where Job states he will die unless God acts to pardon his transgression and take away his iniquity. So, God's intimate governance of his creation means man will die unless God acts to pardon him. That act of God is accomplished in the Son of Adam, Jesus Christ, who came and died and rose again to undo the death in Adam that has passed to everyone of us human beings. God has visited man in the Messiah coming to earth to live, die, and rise again in order to receive the kingdom of the earth the first Adam lost. If God only reigns from heaven and doesn't install his King on his hill in Zion, there is no salvation for men and no righteous reign over the earth.

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 8 say to modern readers?

1. Understanding Psalm 8 helps us understand God's purpose to bring his creation to harmonious restoration. All things are reconciled in Jesus Christ. We are not looking for prosperity here and now, but in his kingdom to come.
2. Understanding Psalm 8 helps us understand our place and value to God. We are so small and insignificant, but being made in God's image is not insignificant. God cares for and values people. Isaiah wrote: "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else."
3. Understanding Psalm 8 leads us to praise God for all his being and works.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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