



Psalm 8

meditation 1 — psalm 8.¹⁻⁹

¹YHWH, Our Lord! How preeminent is Your fame the world over.
Even more, You spread Your grandeur across the heavens!

²In the mouth of suckling babes
You place the power to counter those who oppose You
and annihilate the vindictive enemy.

³When I see the heavens, Your handiwork,
the moon and the stars, which You placed there,

⁴I wonder, "What is a mortal being that You should pay them any attention,
or the human race that you take interest in it?"

⁵You make them something less than divine,
but bestow upon them prominence and pride of place.

⁶You grant them rule over all that You have made.
You subject all to their power:

⁷all flocks and cattle,
as well as all undomesticated animals,

⁸birds inhabiting the sky, and fish, inhabiting the seas,
and traversing the currents of the oceans.

⁹YHWH, Our Lord, how preeminent is your fame the world over! (author's translation)

Though his enemies claim in Psalm 3, "There is no help for him in God," the Psalmist finds confidence in God such that he could sleep peacefully. In Psalm 4, though the Psalmist's enemies seek to smear his reputation, he could, again, sleep well knowing that God would defend him because of his innocence relative to whatever the accusations were. In Psalm 5, the Psalmist is once more under verbal assault. The morning, he promises, would find him confidently praying for God's help, knowing that he is innocent of the claims against him and, more, knowing of God's unwavering devotion to him. In Psalm 6, the Psalmist, once more under assault, reaches a low, spending the night in anxious weeping. Eventually, he regains his confidence that God will come to his aid. In Psalm 7, the Psalmist is again under accusation of guilt, this time of being disloyal to a former close associate. Though his accusers possess the viciousness of a ravenous lion, the Psalmist knows, again, that he is innocent of the charge and that God will defend him against the charges.

We would not want to leave the impression that the Psalmist is wholly consumed by his trials in these five psalms. There are moments when the Psalmist's words are directed at God in exultant praise (3.⁸, 4.⁷⁻⁸, 7.¹⁷). Neither would we want to leave the impression that the Psalmist is narcissistically consumed with his own life. In three of the five psalms, the Psalmist's vision expands, allowing him to see beyond his

personal difficulties and beyond the Lord's devotion to him, to find application in the life of others and to possess something like evangelical fervor in encouraging others (3.⁸, 4.⁶, 5.¹¹⁻¹²).

Still, nothing in these five psalms really prepares us for the expansiveness of vision found in this eighth psalm. The Psalmist's vision expands astronomically from God's dependability in his own life and those close to him who might hear his witness to something global and cosmic.

“YHWH, Our Lord! How preeminent is Your fame the world over.
Even more, You spread Your grandeur across the heavens!”

Even in his darkest moments, the Psalmist has trusted God throughout his ordeal, sure of God's response and aid. He had even discerned that others, many others could also depend upon God. But now, the Psalmist sees that God's influence extends across the globe and, further, out into the cosmos.

The Psalmist has been confident about God's willingness and ability to directly withstand and defeat his enemies. But now the Psalmist's sees that God can, through His own word, empower humans, even the weakest of them, to withstand and defeat the enemy.

“In the mouth of suckling babes
You place the power to counter those who oppose You
and annihilate the vindictive enemy.

This leads him to inspired wonderment—wonderment that this magnificent Being would so willingly involve Himself in the Psalmist's life, or, for that matter, in the life of any mortal being.

“When I see the heavens, Your handiwork,
the moon and the stars, which You placed there,
I wonder, “What is a mortal being that You should pay them any attention,
or the human race that you take interest in it?”

Yet, upon further reflection, the Psalmist sees that God does involve Himself in human affairs, and has from the beginning. Perhaps this reflection is based on scripture that he had not previously appreciated as he does now, after his ordeal. Before the first human being stepped foot on the planet, God granted them “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”¹ This dominion, though far less than that of God, bestowed upon human beings a certain likeness to God. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”²

Such expansive thoughts leave the Psalmist, almost, speechless. After reflecting upon them and God's magnificent generosity toward humankind, the Psalmist can only end where he began.

“YHWH, Our Lord, how preeminent is your fame the world over!

Psalms 3-7 have much in common. It is no great stretch to understand these five Psalms in terms of the same or a similar situation. Psalm 8 serves very well—whether as actually belonging to the circumstances behind the previous five psalms, or through redactional structuring choices—as a fitting conclusion to Psalms 3-5. Indeed, one could think of Psalm 8 as something of an apotheosis that not only serves to conclude the series, but to expand its scope.

¹ Genesis 1.²⁶

² Genesis 1.²⁷

God is not parochial. He embraces all eternity. This insight enhances the Psalmist's wonder at God. It also serves to enhance his understanding of, and appreciation for human beings with whom the great Expansionist willingly and powerfully associates—an association that not only gives them wise rule over God's earthly creation, but over intimidating and destructive enemies such as those met in the previous five psalms.

We can certainly relate to the Psalmist's wonder at God's expansive inclusiveness. We have more than once found ourselves feeling as the LDS hymnist, who confesses,

“I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me.
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.”³

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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³ LDS Hymn # 193