

BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PSALM 8

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO DR. GREG PARSONS

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

HEBREW EXEGESIS (HB621)

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DECEMBER 8, 2003

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Introduction

The superscription on this hymn of praise¹ attributes the Ps. to David. Certainly having spent many, many nights staring at the starry skies while watching his flocks by night, David was as qualified as anyone to write such a ps. as this.

The specific *Sitz im Leben* for this Ps. is not known. The designation that this Ps. is “to the choir-master” might suggest that David had already acquired access to the palace for his work to have been brought to the attention (directly or indirectly) of a person in such a position. However, the Ps. could have actually been written at a much earlier time and later had this designation added.

Expanded Exegetical Outline

- I. Who is the LORD? (vv. 2-3)
 - A. He is Our Master (v. 2).
 - B. He is Exalted Above Everything (v. 2).
 - C. He is So Magnificent He Shames His Enemies by Even the Weakest Things (v. 3).
- II. What Is Man? (vv. 4-9)
 - A. Man is Insignificant. (vv. 4-5)
 - B. Man Is Noticed by God. (v. 5)
 - C. Man Is Co-Regent with God (v. 6a)
 - 1. He is Crowned. (v. 6b)
 - 2. He is Given a Kingdom and Subject. (vv. 7-9)
- III. Conclusion: This LORD – the Creator who even empowers the insignificant elements of His creation to have dominion over those greater than themselves – is indeed worthy of being exalted above all.

Translation and Exegetical Commentary

Verse 1 : לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל־הַגִּיתִּית מְזֻמָּר לְדָוִד: 1

The prologue of this Ps. addresses three specific introductory items. First, it identifies the Ps as being “to the choirmaster” – i.e., to the director of the music,² presumably in connection with the temple/tabernacle.

¹ Anderson, 134.

² HALOT 2, 716. לְמַנְצֵחַ is a piel part. from נָצַח (“to be pre-eminent”) (BDB, ###), and in the piel means “to supervise” (Holladay, 244). With one exception, מְנַצֵּחַ is isolated to the Pss, and is found in 55 of them. The majority of these are Davidic (39), but Korahite and Asaphic, as well as two anonymous Pss use this term. The only non-Ps usage is found in 2Chr 34:13, where it refers to the overseer of construction (Lisowsky, 832).

The second item in the prologue (עַל־הַגִּיתִּית)³ is more difficult to ascertain. עַל־ appears to be used in its accompaniment (“with”) or specification (“concerning, with regard to”) form,⁴ depending on how the accompanying word is understood.

גִּיתִּית (with the definite article) appears to be a technical term relating to a musical aspect of the Ps.,⁵ but it is hard to be certain about anything beyond that.⁶ Three explanations for the use of this word have been offered:⁷

1. A musical instrument from Gath, or something relative to such an instrument;
2. A winepress, or people/things associated with it;
3. A reference connected to the New Year festival.

Since the Pss are of a poetic/musical nature – and since גִּיתִּית is found only in this phrase, and only in three Ps titles⁸ – I find the first explanation preferable. It is not known whether this term indicates that the Ps should be played on that particular instrument or rather that it should be done with some characteristic (e.g., meter, melody) that was typically associated with that instrument.

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד, the third element of the prologue, identifies the Ps as “a melody of David.”⁹

Final Translation: To the choirmaster. With¹⁰ the gittith. A melody of David.

Verse 2: יְהוָה אֱדַגְיִנוּ מִהָאֲדִיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּה הַרְדֵּךְ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם: 2

The ps. proper begins with the reassuring affirmation that the great One which the psalmist is about to discuss is, in fact, *our* Lord. The first word (יְהוָה) identifies the LORD as the focal point. And if “recent scholars”¹¹ are correct about the meaning behind this name (“the one bringing into being” or “creator”), this would be a most appropriate way to identify the God about which such a beautiful ps. of creation is written.

Since the psalmist makes his address to the LORD Himself, I opt to use the traditional “O LORD.”

The LORD is not pictured as some vague, distant tyrant as many cultures viewed their god(s), but as stated earlier there is a sense of belonging in the concept of Him being “our Lord/master” (אֱדַגְיִנוּ).¹² It is somewhat surprising that such a wonderful

³ According to the BHS footnote, LXX, Symmachus and Jerome have this as plural, likewise 81:1a, 84:1a. This variant would be explained by a scribal error of mis-reading the ך as a ך.

⁴ Williams § 289, 293.

⁵ HALOT 1, 206-07.

⁶ The word is of likely of Ug. origin (גִּת), and is used for both a winepress (Is 63:2) and the Philistine town of Gath (1K 2:40) (HALOT 1, 206-207).

⁷ HALOT, 904; Holladay, 65; NIDOTTE 1, 904; Jastrow, 275

⁸ (8:1, 81:1, 84:1) (Lisowsky, 335)

⁹ This phrase is used 23x (BDB, 274). (Holladay (189) opts to translate מִזְמוֹר as “Psalm.”) מִזְמוֹר is also used of Pss by other authors, as well as anonymous pss.

¹⁰ Or “According to (the style of)...”

¹¹ BDB, 218.

¹² אֱדַגְיִנוּ is found only 7 times, and only in this Ps (twice) in the book of Ps. (See also 1S 25:14, 17; 1K 1:43, 47; Neh 10:30.) (Mandelkern, 15.) It was noted that all passages except Neh. use the word twice within a relatively few verses. (If there are any implications from this I’ve not identified them.)

combination of terms (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ) is only found three times in the OT – and two of those times are in this ps.¹³

Having introduced the principle subject of the ps., the writer introduces the main point of the ps. with the exclamation, “How majestic is your name.” Although typically used as a question, הַכֵּה (“how”) is here used in an exclamatory sense.¹⁴ אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a difficult word to narrow to a single term¹⁵ – but such is quiet fitting for a word attempting to describe the very nature of God. While I opt for the traditional rendering of “majestic,” the word “magnificent” is an inviting substitute.

Even though the scriptures demand that the proper name of God be duly honored (Ex. 20:7), that is not the intent of שְׁמִי (“your name”) here. The use of שֵׁם in Prov 22:1 (“A good name <reputation> is rather to be chosen...”) is closer in meaning to this concept, but still not a satisfactory understanding of the term. Ultimately “name” here refers to the revealed character¹⁶ of God. So, the psalmist is here saying that it is the *character*¹⁷ of God that is exalted.

God’s name/character is majestic בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ.¹⁸ In other words, there is not a place on our globe that is exempt from the responsibility of acknowledging that God is great. Furthermore, there is not a place man has set foot on our planet – from the lush rainforests to the driest desert to the polar ice caps and even to the searchable depths of the sea – where he has not been shown the greatness of God proclaimed by the creation itself. And certainly future exploration to yet unreached places will continue to allow that creation to subtly, yet most assuredly, proclaim the greatness of our Lord to anyone that will dare to listen.

The next phrase in the text is quiet difficult – enough so that the BHS editors believe there to be a corruption in the expression אֲשֶׁר הִנָּהוּ.¹⁹ With a large degree of uncertainty my best rendering of the balance of this verse is “whose splendor is placed/set

The meanings incl. lord, master, kings, proprietor, husband, governor, prince. It is translated as κύριος (Lord) in the LXX.

¹³ According to the Qere, the combination of הַכֵּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Oh LORD, our Lord) occurs only three times in the OT. Two are in this Ps (vv 2, 10), and the remaining one in Neh. 10:30[29].

¹⁴ Williams, §127.

¹⁵ In the verb form (הִכֵּה) this carries the thought of “to be wide, great” (Qal); “To be majestic, glorious” (Niph.). In its adj. form (as here) it is used as:

- ❖ “Mighty, splendid” (Holladay, 4).
- ❖ Magnificent, excellent, splendid, usually with the implication of mighty or powerful (NIDOTTE, 276).
- ❖ Is applied to God, His name, earthly kings and nations as well as inanimate objects (waves, ships, vines and trees). Also used substantively for nobles. (NIDOTTE, 276)
- ❖ A mantle or robe, perhaps emphasizing the robe’s magnificence or impressiveness (NIDOTTE, 276).

¹⁶ BDB, 1028-29.

¹⁷ It might be that this use of *name* is a figure of speech (substitution / synecdoche / part for whole), but it is probably better to understand “character” as an alternate meaning of שֵׁם.

¹⁸ אֶרֶץ is found 2505 times in a broad range of [geographical] meanings. (NIDOTTE 1, 518), but here, combined with כָּל־, it simply refers to all the earth.

The question remains as to the proper translation of כֵּן. Locative (“in”) is the normal understanding, and likely the correct meaning. However, in light of the following verse(s) when the elements of creation prompt the psalmist to exalt the LORD, the causal use of כֵּן (“because of”) is an intriguing idea.

¹⁹ For a fuller discussion of this difficulty see the textual study in Appendix B.

above/upon the heavens.” הַדָּדָהּ (“your splendor”²⁰) is in parallel meaning to אֲדִיר. And as the former is throughout the earth, so the later is above the heavens (עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם). In fact, the two elements of earth and heaven appear to form a [broken] merism, meaning that the LORD’s majesty/splendor is known throughout the universe.

Final Translation:

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is your name in all the earth
Whose splendor is placed/set above/upon the heavens.

Verse 3²¹:מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים יִסְדֶּה עוֹ לְמַעַן צוֹרְרָיָהּ לְהִשָּׁבֵיחַ אוֹיְבֵי וּמְהַנְקָם: 3
Verse 3 begins with a hendiadys of עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים (“children²² and nursing babies²³”).²⁴ Speaking poetically, it is from the mouths (מִפִּי) of these babies that God established²⁵ עֹז (“strength”).²⁶

This strength is given “on account of” (לְמַעַן) those who are attacking²⁷ Him (or His enemies). To be more specific, this strength is to cause to debase (לְהִשָּׁבֵיחַ) the

²⁰ Rt. דָּדָהּ, Weight, power, splendor, height, majesty (Holladay, 77; NIDOTTE 1, 1016). Is applied to God (Isa 30:30), to humans (e.g., kings (1Chr 29:25), Moses (Num 27:20), and a young man (Prov 5:9)), and to natural elements (e.g., war horse (Job 39:20) and olive tree (Hos 14:7)). “When used of God, this term often denotes the revelation of his majesty to people.” (NIDOTTE 1, 1016) LXX most frequently uses *doxa*, glory, to translate this word.

²¹ At first view the presence of v. 3 is problematic, for the flow of the text seems to work better without it. V. 2 ends with a ref. to heaven and v. 4 begins with viewing the heavens, and v.3 doesn’t easily fit into that flow. However, without any textual reason to question its validity it is assumed to be genuine.

²² Simply listed as “child” with no further specification (BDB, 760; HALOT 2, 798).

²³ יִנְקִים is actually a Qal part of יִנְקָה, and is literally “the ones sucking,” thus in context, nursing babies. Note, however, that this word can apply to children up to the age of two or three, which was the time when children were weaned (NIDOTTE 2, 472).

According to the Qere, this is the only occurrence of this word in the OT.

²⁴ An alternate rendering would be to translate the waw as “even,” thus giving “children, even nursing babies.” This added flair emphasizes the smallness/weakness of the one the Lord chooses to use.

²⁵ יִסְדֶּה, lit. “to lay the foundations of” (Holladay, 136).

²⁶ The range of meaning for עֹז incl: Might, strength; fortifications of a town (ramparts); God’s might; strength, might of the king, power (HALOT 2, 805; Holladay, 269; NIDOTTE 3, 365). The cognate forms found in Ugar., ‘z; Eth., *azaza*; Akk. *ezezu*, mean “be annoyed or angry, fall into a rage.” The Sam. ‘az; Aram. ‘zz, mean “be strong;” and the Syr. ‘az, “be powerful;” Phoen. ‘z, “power, force” (NIDOTTE 3, 366).

עֹז occurs 94 times, in a large range of contexts and subjects, incl. Leviathan’s neck (Job 41:14), the firmament (Ps 150:1), the scepter of the king (Ps 110:2), a strong tower (Judg 9:51), and the clothing of the virtuous woman (Prov 31:25), but most frequently used in connection with God. (NIDOTTE 3, 372-73)

A footnote in BHS notes that the Syriac text has a variant reading for עֹז. That variant *tsbwhk* (“your glory”) is also in agreement with LXX (which, surprisingly is not noted in the BHS margin) and supported by Knox. Neither reading is without its own difficulties, for accepting “strength” fosters the question of what that strength really implies and how it is “from the mouths of babies.” On the other hand, while “praise” causes no interpretation problem with the first half of the verse, the question of how it is used to destroy (BDB’s definition for the term in this passage) the Lord’s enemies must now be grappled with. According to Matt. (21>16), when Christ made reference to this verse He used “praise” instead of “strength.” Based largely upon this, at this point, I reservedly opt for the alternate reading (“praise”), and change the translation of לְהִשָּׁבֵיחַ to “to cause to desist.”

hostile²⁸ and the avenger (אֹיֵב וְמַחֲנִיקִים)²⁹ – another hendiadys which makes a striking contrast (parallel) to the one earlier in the verse.

Final Translation:

From the mouths of children and nursing babies
you have established praise because of your enemies,
to cause the hostile and the revengeful to desist.

Verse 4: כִּי־אֶרְאֶה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצְבְּעֹתַיִךְ יָרַח וְכוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנָתָה: 4

The psalmist begins a new section by sharing his personal³⁰ contemplation of the magnitude of God's creation. When³¹ his eyes see and his heart considers all the heavenly bodies³² on a clear night; as he considers that each of these are the Lord's handiwork (מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצְבְּעֹתַיִךְ, lit. "the works³³ of your fingers"³⁴); yea, when he notes that

²⁷ צוֹרְרִיךְ is a Qal Part. w/ 2ms suff., and is literally "your harassers/vexers" (BDB, 865) or "(your) attacker, enemy" (HALOT 3, 1058-59). The root, צָרַר, is rendered as (Qal) "be too narrow, cramped; be hampered, impeded, be hard, be oppressed, afflicted"; (Pual) "tied up"; (Hif.) Oppress, afflict, be in labor (Holladay, 311) It is used of enemies of Israel, as well as enemies of individuals, and even enemies of God (as here) (NIDOTTE 3, 859)

The cognates incl. Ugar. *srr* ("hurt"), Akk. *serru* ("enemy"), and Arab. *darra* ("inflict harm") (NIDOTTE 3, 859).

Jerome renders this with 1st person singular suffix, but with no more textual support than that I believe the K reading to be preferable.

²⁸ אֹיֵב (Qal Part.) "the ones being hostile / enemy(s)" (BDB). Outside of Ps this word usually refs. to national enemies of Israel (126 times, compared to 48 times for personal enemies, and 40 times for enemies of the king or leader of Israel, and 25 times to enemies of the Lord) (NIDOTTE 1, 366). However, of the 74 occurrences in the Pss it most frequently refs to the enemies of the psalmist as an individual. (NIDOTTE 1, 367), although here it is a ref. to the personal enemy of the LORD.

The root is אָבַח, with cognates in Akk. *ayyabu* ("enemy") and Ugar. *ib* ("enemy"). It occurs 283 times, with all Qal. Part but one (Ex. 23:22, Qal Perf.). Found scattered through sections of the OT, it denotes hatred and active hostility on the part of a person or group of persons...directed towards an individual, group, or nation. (NIDOTTE 1, 365)

Almost always rendered in LXX as *echthra* (enmity) (NIDOTTE 1, 370).

²⁹ The Q notes that this word occurs only twice. The second is Ps. 44:17, which in fact uses both of these words in a similar construction.

³⁰ The BHS editor notes that the Syriac renders this as 3rd person plural ("they see"). I find no plausible explanation for an inadvertent scribal error. My only guess is that a scribe purposely changed the form, believing the subject of this verb to be the enemies in the previous verse.

³¹ Temporal use of כִּי (Williams, §445).

³² Lit., "your heavens" (שָׁמַיִךְ). (LXX omits the suffix.)

³³ מַעֲשֵׂי means "work, deed, product, power, act" (NIDOTTE 3, 546). HALOT incl. "work; labour; accomplishment; works and deeds of God; human achievement." (HALOT 2, 616-17).

מַעֲשֵׂי is the construct form of מַעֲשֵׂה ("work, deed") (BDB, 795). It is this latter form that is found in the Targum, many Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac. The LXX seemingly follows, rendering as *ergon* which is the normal translation of מַעֲשֵׂה (NIDOTTE 3, 551) The marginal notes note that the K form is found only six times in the OT, while the abs. Form occurs 220 times. The principle of preferring the rare to the common suggests that the K reading to be preferable.

³⁴ אֶצְבְּעֹתַיִךְ (anthropomorphism) is used in reference to God in a number of ways: His writing (Ex 31:18 and Deu 9:10), the power of God (Ex. 8:19[15]), as well as His creative work (here) (NIDOTTE 1, 485).

night after night, year after year, these awesome works are firmly established (כִּוְנָנְתָהּ)³⁵ in their courses....

Final Translation:

When I see

Your heavens, the work of your fingers,

The moon and stars, which you have established...

Verse 5: מִהֲאֵנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ: 5

In light of all of the splendor of the created heavens (v. 4) the psalmist is brought to ask the rhetorical question: “What is man (אָנוֹשׁ,³⁶ and later בֶּן־אָדָם³⁷) that the Creator of such wonders is willing to take special notice (תִּזְכְּרֶנּוּ³⁸ and תִּפְקְדֶנּוּ³⁹) of him?” This question emphasizes the insignificance of mankind, presumably in comparison to the splendor of many of the other forms of creation.

Final Translation:

³⁵ The root (כָּוַן) means stand firm; be sable; establish, found appoint. It is a “tech. term for holding the arrow firmly on the bow” (Holladay, 153).

The marginal notes indicate that this is the only occurrence of this word in this form.

³⁶ “Behind the Heb. nom. is the vb. ‘*ns*, be weak, sick, feeble (cf. Akkad. *enesu*)” (NIDOTTE 1, 453), although human weakness is not necessarily emphasized each time the word is used. (NIDOTTE 1, 454) Cognates incl. Ugar. *ans*, Akkad. *nisu* (“people”), *nisutu* (“kin”). (NIDOTTE 1, 453)

The word occurs 42x in OT (NIDOTTE 1, 453), mostly in poetic sections (Job, Ps, Isa; The only occurrence in the Pent. is Deut. 32:26, which is itself a poetic passage) (NIDOTTE 1, 454).

³⁷ Parallelism between אָנוֹשׁ and בֶּן־אָדָם noted in a number of refs, incl. Job, Ps. and Isa. “These parallelisms suggest that there are probably no major differences in meaning or nuance between” these two words (NIDOTTE 1, 453).

Moloney puts a Christological interpretation into בֶּן־אָדָם, based upon a similar use of that expression in the gospels and other NT passages. While I suppose such an intent could have been in the mind of God as He inspired the penning of this Psalm, it just seems to be forcing NT theology back into the OT mindset.

³⁸ Root is זָכַר (mention; remember, think of, be mindful) (Holladay, 88). It may be noteworthy that זָכַר is very similar (in sound) to אָנוֹשׁ, a word for “man” (i.e., male), although the latter is not used here.

³⁹ Root is פָּקַד, which in the qal means “attend to, take note of, care for, punish, muster, assemble, record, enroll, commit, appoint, call to account, avenge;” Ni “be missed, be lacking, be installed, be called to account;” Piel, “muster;” Pual, “Be enrolled, mustered;” Hith “appoint, entrust, commit.” (NIDOTTE 3, 657)

“There is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as *pqd*”

Four options are suggested:

1. Attend to with care, take note
2. Look at, carefully observe
3. Miss, worry about
4. Determine the destiny

“It is probable, then, that the basic meaning of *pqd* is something like attend to observe....” (NIDOTTE 3, 658).

A third (ca. 121 times) of all occurrences are associated with military (Josh 8:10) or taxation censuses. “That *pqd* involves counting or numbering is obvious from the fact that totals are often reported” (NIDOTTE 3, 658)

“The use of *pqd* in conjunction with vbs. like *zkr*, remember [as this passage]... emphasizes the perception and response implicit in the vb.” (NIDOTTE 3, 659)

What (is) man, that you remember him,
And the son of man, that you pay attention to him?

Verse 6 : וַתִּחַסְרֵהוּ מֵעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכְבוֹד וְהָדָר תִּעֲטֶרְהוּ 6

But taking notice of insignificant man is only the beginning of the attention that God gives to mankind. Not only does the Creator of all things notice man, He has caused him, at least in some ways, to hold a position that is slightly below (וַתִּחַסְרֵהוּ מֵעַט)⁴⁰ that of than Himself (“God”⁴¹). It is, as it were, that the King of all creation promoted mankind to be co-regent with Him.⁴²

Since a king needs a crown, the Lord crowns⁴³ man by sharing a portion of glory (וְכָבוֹד)⁴⁴ and majesty (וְהָדָר)⁴⁵ – qualities *very similar* to those the psalmists has already established belong to the Lord.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Root (חָסַר) means (Qal) diminish, do without; (Piel, as here) make one lack, deprive (Holladay, 112).

The marginal notes indicate that this is the only occurrence of this form of the word.

⁴¹ See Appendix A for an expanded discussion of the difficulty of this phrase.

⁴² Although no concept of equality is intended here, nor is there the intention that man is made to be “slightly less” than God in all of God’s attributes.

⁴³ וַתִּחַסְרֵהוּ is a figure of speech – a hypocatastasis to the kingship that God has placed upon mankind.

The root word (עָטַר) means: Qal “to surround”; Piel “to crown”; Hith. “to bestow crowns”. The Arab. *tr* means surround. The term was also used of one army closing in on another (IS 23:26) (NIDOTTE 3, 383)

“...[T]he choice between crown and surround must be carefully weighted [as here].... This phrase may be understood as consequent upon the previous phrase, ‘You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings.... On the other hand, the phrase in question may be regarded as introductory to the following, ‘You made him ruler over the works of your hands.’ In this case the translation ‘crowned’ is to be preferred....” (NIDOTTE 3, 383)

וַתִּחַסְרֵהוּ occurs only here in OT.

⁴⁴ Used ca. 200 times (HALOT 2, 457), the meanings of כְּבוֹד incl. dignity, high position (Prov. 15:33); respect or reverence (1C 17:18); object of respect (Jer 2:11) (NIDOTTE 2, 580-81); Heaviness; riches; reputation, importance; glory, splendor; distinction, honor. (HALOT 2, 457)

The root word (כָּבַד) means “to be heavy, unresponsive, honored.....” (NIDOTTE 2, 577). It is “widely attested in the Sem. Family, with cognates in Akk., Arab., OSA, Eth., Amarna Can., Phoen., Ugar., with meanings in the realm of heavy, difficult, honored” (NIDOTTE 2, 577). The LXX frequently uses *doxa* (glory) and its cognates to translate this word.

Of special note in the present discussion is the fact that this is a technical term for God’s manifest presence (Ex 16:7) (NIDOTTE 2, 580-81). The implication is that, as already stated, God is sharing with mankind a portion of the qualities of kingship that He possesses.

The LXX, Syriac and Jerome omit the *waw*, but this appears to be due to a difference in sentence structure, not in meaning. Specifically, it appears that the LXX (and presumably the others) make a sentence between וְכָבוֹד and מֵאֱלֹהִים, making the *waw* unnecessary. These versions do, however, pick up the “stray” *waw* and added it to the תְּמַשִּׁי לְהוֹרֵי which introduces the next verse.

⁴⁵ וְהָדָר connotes ornament, attire splendor (Holladay, 77); Adornment, splendor, majesty (NIDOTTE 1, 1013). Biblical Aramaic defines this as “Honour, majesty (of king)” (Dn. 5:18) (BDB, 1089). “Outside of Heb. and Aram. Dialects, there is no certain cognate....” (NIDOTTE 1, 1013)

The word is used of the splendor of cities (Ez 27:10), the clothing of the virtuous woman (???), the grey hair of an old man (Prov. 20:29) (NIDOTTE 1, 1014). The most common words used in the LXX to translate this word are *doxa* (glory), *euprepeia* (fine appearance), and *megaloprepeia* (magnificence) (NIDOTTE 1, 1015).

This word used of the splendor of a king (Ps. 21:6). However in ref. to mankind at large, and this verse in particular, “...perhaps this word is used because the psalm pictures humankind as God’s vice-regent over nature” (NIDOTTE 1, 1014).

Final Translation:

You made him a little lower than God,
And crowned him with glory and majesty.

Verse 7: תַּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יְדָיָךְ כָּל שָׂתָה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו: 7
No king, even a co-regent, is a king without something to rule, so in His giving the Lord has provided (תַּמְשִׁילֶהוּ)⁴⁷ a kingdom and subjects for mankind to rule. Man's bestowed kingdom is the realm of all creation (בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יְדָיָךְ)⁴⁸ and God has placed⁴⁹ all things (כָּל) – which are further specified in the following verse – as man's subjects (those תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו).⁵⁰

Final Translation:

You made him to rule over (the) works of your hand,
All things you have put under his feet.

Verses 8 & 9.....: צִנְה וְאֵלֶּפִים כָּלֶם וְגַם בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי: 8
.....: צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדָגֵי הַיָּם לְכָר אֲרָחוֹת יָמִים: 9

These next two verses go to some length to specify the subjects within the God-appointed reign of mankind. The categories of animal listed include domesticated animals (צִנְה וְאֵלֶּפִים⁵¹), maybe wild animals (בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי),⁵² birds, fish and other sea

Also noteworthy is the fact that הָרַךְ (v.2) is often used in parallel with הָרַךְ in ref. to God (NIDOTTE 1, 1016), but here the latter is used instead with man. It would seem that this further illustrates God's bestowing upon man portions of those things which belong to Him.

⁴⁶ Note, however, that while the psalmist has attributed two words indicating the splendor of kingship, he avoided using either of the earlier pair that were attributed to the Lord. I think this is in keeping with the "little lower than" idea in v. 6a – man has here been given similar, but not identical, characteristics of kingship.

⁴⁷ Lit. "cause him to rule" (Hiph. Imperf 2MS + 3MS Suff of מָשַׁל, "to rule"). In Qal rule, govern, have dominance over; Hiph. install someone as ruler. "msl and its derivatives with the meaning of "rule" or "govern" are absent in neighboring languages of the ANE." (NIDOTTE 2, 1137)

"[S]pecifically refers to the act of having control or dominion over and is therefore not exclusively bound to the king as subject." (NIDOTTE 2, 1137) Used of humans, God, and also the sun and moon.

As already noted, the LXX and Syriac add a *waw* not found in the K reading. (See footnote in previous verse.)

⁴⁸ See notes in v. 4 for a fuller discussion of the בְּמַעֲשֵׂי vs. בְּמַעֲשֵׂה readings that is duplicated here as well. יְדָיָךְ - 1617 occurrences, and "can be used meonymically to describe God's might acts".

(NIDOTTE 2, 402-03)

⁴⁹ שָׂתָה, "you put" (Qal Perf of שָׂתָה, "to put, set").

⁵⁰ Another figure of speech (Substitution / metonymy / adjunct), here used to mean "subjection or conquest" (BDB, 1065).

⁵¹ Some/Several Hebrew manuscripts read צִנְה ("flock"), but צִנְה is simply an "orthographic variant" of צִנְה. (HALOT 3, 1037).

⁵² שָׂדֵי (field). This is a poetic form or שָׂדֵה. It is found 13x, compared to 320x for the non-poetic form, and is used of open, wide land; cultivable fields; regions of people. Derives for the same etymon as Akk. *sadu(m)*, "mountain, open country." *sd* occurs in Old Can., Can., Phoen., and Pun. with the meaning "field, plain" (NIDOTTE 3, 1217)

creatures. However, it seems this list is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather they are representative of the whole⁵³ animal kingdom. In short, God has determined that all living creatures are to be subjects to man.⁵⁴

Final Translation:

All flocks and cattle, and also the animals (of the) field,
Birds of the heavens and fish of the sea which are traveling the paths of the
seas.

Verse 10: הָיָה אֲדֹנָיִנוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֵךְ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ: 10

The psalmist ends where he begins: Considering all the mighty works of God, His working through the most insignificant and unlikely elements (babies) to accomplish his will, even to the point that He shares the attributes and characteristics of His kingship with man..., certainly the core nature of such a one is worthy of being exalted above all else in this world and beyond.⁵⁵

Final Translation:

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Summary

Completed Psalm 8

1. To the choirmaster. With/According to the gittith. A melody of David.
2. O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is your name in all the earth
Whose splendor is placed/set above/upon the heavens.
3. From the mouths of children and nursing babies
you have established praise because of your enemies,
to cause the hostile and the revengeful to desist.
4. When I see
Your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and stars, which you have established...
5. What (is) man, that you remember him,
And the son of man, that you pay attention to him?
6. You made him a little lower than God,
And crowned him with glory and majesty.
7. You made him to rule over (the) works of your hand,
All things you have put under his feet.

⁵³ בְּהֵמָה (beast/animals) is used of both domestic and wild animals, but mostly domestic. (NIDOTTE 1, 612).

⁵⁴ This figure of speech is substitution / synecdoche / parts for whole.

⁵⁴ Cf. Gen. 1:26, 28, where the details of the list are not identical to this passage, but the meaning is obviously the same.

⁵⁵ Since this verse is a duplicate of v. 2a, see that verse for technical notes.

8. All flocks and cattle, and also the animals (of the) field,
9. Birds of the heavens
and fish of the sea which are traveling the paths of the seas.
10. O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is your name in all the earth.

Synthesis of Psalm 8

Verse Summary

2. The *name* of the Lord is exalted above all heaven and earth.
3. The Lord uses (even) the simple things to expose and destroy His enemy.
4. When the psalmist observes the Lord's mighty works in the heavens...
5. ...he is forced to wonder that the Lord to take note of the insignificant mankind.
6. God has given man a position slightly below that of Himself, and even honoring him
with a special glory
- 7-9 God has given man rule over His creation.
- 10 The nature/character of the Lord is exalted above all things.

Paragraph Analysis

- v. 2-3 – (First part of inclusio that bookends the whole Ps. (cf. v. 10.)) Our LORD is greater than everything in all the heavens and the earth – great enough that He can use even the most uncomplicated and weak means to avenge Himself against those that oppose Him. (cf. 1Cor 1:27)
- v. 4-9 – In light of the massive works of God's creation, it is amazing that He chose to give something as insignificant as mankind the responsibility of governing that creation.
- v. 10 – (The latter part of inclusio which summarizes the Ps. by repeating the idea of v. 2.) Indeed, the Lord is exalted above all things.

Summary of the Whole Psalm

Our LORD is indeed a great God – one so great that He is capable of enabling the weaker elements of His creation to overrule for the greater things.

OR

“To summarize: In this magnificent hymn the psalmist moves to affirm man's place as lord of the creation because of the will of God. The psalm is a praise to God the Creator who is his infinite wisdom and power has placed man at the head of his creation.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Childs, 23-24.

Sermon Outline⁵⁷ and Applications

I. Who is the LORD? (vv. 2-3)

A. He is Our Master (v. 2).

- There is a wonderful sense of belonging in this concept.
- We who cherish freedom of choice (often to the point of worshipping it) often fail to realize that that freedom “enslaves” us to the responsibilities that accompany it. However, if we chose to relinquish that freedom of choice, accept the LORD as our Lord/master, then we enjoy the greater freedom of leaving all things in His hands.

B. He is Exalted Above Everything (v. 2).

- If the dumb animals and the mindless inanimate creation exalt the Lord, shouldn't we as God's highest creation show at least as much sense as they?

C. He is So Magnificent He Shames His Enemies by Even The Weakest Things (v. 3).

- Who of us as adults haven't experience the chagrin of having the validity of a long-standing believe shredded by the innocent question of a child? Imagine how the Lord can use that very type of scenario against those that oppose Him.

II. What Is Man? (vv. 4-9)

A. Man is Insignificant. (vv. 4-5)

- Break down the elemental components of the human body and calculate the current fair market value of those elements.
- Compare the human abilities in raw strength, running, endurance, etc. to other life forms on our planet.
- All this, and more, show the relative insignificance that mankind inherently possesses.

B. Man Is Noticed by God. (v. 5)

- Consider what it would be like for the President of the United States (and various other people of renown) to want to “drop in and get to know you.” That would pale in comparison to insignificant man receiving the noticed of God.

C. Man Is Co-Regent with God (v. 6a)

- Contrary to so much of what we hear today,⁵⁸ mankind is not an equal among the multitude of life forms, but has the God-given rule of His creation.

⁵⁷ While not exegetically parallel to the passage, one title and outline of this Psalm might be:

A Psalm for Journalism 101

I. *How* (מַה, v. 2)

II. *Who* (מִי, v. 2)

III. *When* (מַתַּי, v. 4)

IV. *What* (מַה, v. 5)

V. *Where* – as in, “Where do I stand.” This generic statement allows for any number of invitations, incl. an exhortation to exalt the Lord as the psalmist did, or an evangelistic call to know the great God that the psalmist knew and praised.

VI. *Why* (still part of the invitation) – Because the exalted God in Ps 8 that has a special purpose for mankind also has a special plan for each of us individually. Isn't it time that you agreed to cooperate with that plan?

- However, this rule should not be considered to be a license to pillage the planet, but should be considered a responsibility of stewardship – for which man is answerable to the Creator.
 - This exalted position should not be allowed to cloud our mind to the inherent insignificance we have without the special notice that God has extended to us.
- III. Conclusion: This LORD – the Creator who even empowers the insignificant elements of His creation to have dominion over those greater than themselves – is indeed worthy of being exalted above all.
- We should exalt the Lord because of His character, which is above all things.
 - We should exalt the Lord because of His creation, and the splendor it shows of His workmanship.
 - We should exalt the Lord because of His caring, and the position that has prompted Him to share with us.

Note: Ideally the sermon based upon the above outline would be accompanied by songs that exalt the Lord's name, and esp. those that connect that exaltation with His creative work (e.g., *How Great Thou Art*). If facilities allow, a PowerPoint presentation including images of the beauty and majesty of the Lord's handiwork in creation would be another excellent touch. Testimonies might also be sought from those who have experienced the handiwork of God in areas of the creation that many in the congregation wouldn't be familiar with (e.g., scuba diving in exotic places, mountain climbing).

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Preaching the Psalm 8*.

Appendix A
Mini-Word Study of אֱלֹהִים

I. Definition

A. Dictionary Meaning

1. BDB..... Rulers, judges; God; Angels; gods; (used 2570x).
2. HALOT..... Gods; god, deity; (used 2250x).
3. Holladay..... A God/god (any god); The true God; (used 2250x).
4. DCH..... God
5. Jastrow..... (see אֱלֹהִים) God; Pl. – Deities, powers

Summary: It seems that is largely concerned with a form of deity (God or gods).
Other definitions for other supernatural and even human usage are also noted.

B. Etymology

1. Cognate languages (BDB, HALOT, NIDOTTE, etc.)
 - “Elohim is not attested outside of the OT” (NIDOTTE 1, 405).
 - “El is a common, generic Sem. Appellative for the deity. El is also the name of the high god in some cultures...” (NIDOTTE 1, 400), as seen below:
 - Akk. – אֱל
 - Sam. – אֱל
 - Ph. – אֱל, אֱלִי
 - Sab. – אֱל
 - Can. – אֱלִי (?)
 - OSA – ‘L (“God, contrasted with sym ‘patron deity” (Biella, 15))

Summary: The cognate languages provide no help with אֱלֹהִים, but their use of its root אֱל is generally consistent with Hebrew usage.

C. Derivatives

- There are numerous derivatives, esp. in proper names.⁵⁹ However, each of these derivatives are used in ref. to God, not to any of the other rarer translations of אֱלֹהִים.

D. Translations

1. LXX (Hatch & Redpath; Arndt & Gingrich)
 - αγγελος – (Note: Some of these occurrences are the translation of a *phrase* of which *elohim* was only a *part* (e.g., “sons of God”), and not a direct word-for-word translation of *elohim* alone).
 - εἰδολεῖον – False god, idol.
 - θεῖος – Divine being, divinity.
 - θεοσ – Divine beings, God.
 - κυριος – Lord.
 - παντοκρατωρ – The Almighty, All-Powerful, Omnipotent (One)

⁵⁹ 146 names built upon אֱל are listed by DCH (259).

2. AV (Youngs)
 - God (freq.)
 - Gods/goddess (242)
 - Judges (5)
 - Angels (1)
3. NASB (NAS Ex. Conc.)
 - God (2300x+)
 - gods (200x+)
 - judges (3x)
4. NIV (Zond. NIV Ex. Conc)
 - God (2250x+)
 - gods (200x+)
 - angels (1)
 - heavenly beings (1)

II. Usage

- Lisowsky, Even-Shoshan and Mandelkern were all consulted, but the huge number of entries made them of little practical value in looking up and listing a significant percentage of the occurrences. Instead, this study opted to limit its consideration to only those occurrences found to have a meaning other than God/gods.
- A. In Pss
 - Angels (Ps 29:1; 89:6) – However, this translates the whole expression “sons of God,” making angels correspond to “sons” while elohim is still reserved for God Himself.
 - Angels/Heavenly Beings/gods (Ps 97:7; 138:1) – Interpretation is not clear.
- B. In other poetic writings
 - Angels (?) (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7) – Also translation for “sons of God.”
- C. In other OT books
 - Demons (Deut. 32:17)
 - Spirit of the dead (I Sam. 28:13)
 - Mighty prince (Gen. 23:6)
 - Angels (?) (Gen. 6:2, 4) – The meaning of this description is quite unclear. Nevertheless, this is once again the use of “sons of God” (see above).

III. Synonyms and Antonyms

- A. Synonyms of אֱלֹהִים
 1. יְהוָה – LORD
 2. קְדוֹשׁ – Holy one
 3. פֶּסֶל – Idol
 4. שַׁדַּי – Shaddai
 5. עֶלְיוֹן – the Most High
 6. צוּר – rock

B. Antonyms

1. אֱלֹהִים is in fact used as its own antonym, in a sense. “Shall a man make gods (אֱלֹהִים) unto himself, and they are no gods (אֱלֹהִים)?” (Jer. 16:20).
2. Man (אִישׁ) is also somewhat of an antonym of אֱלֹהִים. “‘Man’ especially appears in antithesis to ‘God’” (Num 23:19) (TDOT 1, 273).

IV. Conclusion

Based upon the following reasons:

1. The default translation for אֱלֹהִים is obviously either God or gods. Other renderings are possible, but must be convincingly argued from the context or by the combining of additional terms (e.g., “sons of God”) to form a different concept. Neither apply to this situation;
2. “God” is an acceptable rendering in this context;
3. “God” fits seamlessly with the established flow of thought, while the use of angels or other rendering would require the introduction of a new and otherwise unrelated element into the flow of the ps.;
4. “God” is a much smoother fit to the parallelism of the verse in question:

<u>Verse 6a</u>	<u>Verse 6b</u>
You made us	You crowned us
A little lower than God	with glory and honor (<i>attributes already assigned to the Lord in v.2</i>);
5. The parallel ideas in v. 7 of (caused man to be in charge and have authority) seem to better fit the concepts that go with God (who has made and owns all things) than it would for “heavenly beings,” which would be without an easily understood connection of thought;

I’m left to conclude that psalmist originally intended אֱלֹהִים to be understood as the one true God.

Having said that, the issue of Heb. 2:6-8 must be addressed. In making reference to Ps 8:6, the inspired Heb. writer unquestionably states that man is made a little lower than the angels (αγγέλους). However, the truth of the later does not require a reworking of the former. For example, suppose three students (A, B, and C) have taken a test, and make 100%, 95%, and 92% respectively. Student C might rightfully states “My grade is a little lower than Student A.” If later someone comments “Student C’s grade is a little lower that Student B’s,” the truth of the latter in no way invalidates the truth of the earlier statement.

Likewise, it appears the psalmist meant that man has been made a little lower than the one true God (at least in some particular ways which the psalmist has in mind). The NT writer adds more detail to the thought – i.e., that man is made a little lower than the angels [as well] – but the latter by no means need draw into question the validity of the former.

Appendix B

Textual Problem

A textual problem is mentioned in v 2, footnote a. The problem concerns אֲשֶׁר הִנָּה (lit., “which give” (2nd person, Impv.)). The editor for BHS considers this reading to be corrupt. (HALOT concurs (HALOT 4, 160).) Actual and suggested alternate readings listed in the footnote are:

- ❖ LXX ὅτι ἐπήρθη “so/in-order-that/because-that he/it was taken up/raised up” <Aor. Pass. of ἐπάίπω>,
 - ❖ Syriac (Targum) *djhbt* qui dedisti.....
 - ❖ Symmachus (Jerome) ὅς ἐτάξας “who/which ordered/placed/appointed <Aor. Act. from τάσσω (assign, appoint)>;
 - ❖ (To be) read אֲשֶׁר נִתְּהָה “who/which you gave” <Qal Pret 2MS from נָתַן, “to give”>),
 - ❖ It has been proposed אֲשֶׁר נָתַן “who/which being given(?)” <Niph. Part. MS from נָתַן, “to give”>.
 - ❖ ...or אֲשֶׁר נִתְּהָה “the earth which shows (announces) your sovereignty” (HALOT 4, 1760) <Qal Pret 3FS from נָתַן, “to give”>.
- There is no listing of הִנָּה Hatch & Redpath.
 - Mandelkern (Mandelkern, 781) list 23 identical occurrences of הִנָּה, but all the others appear to connote an imperative/command, which is not quite in keeping with the tone of this psalm.

Conclusion:

It is difficult to reconstruct a probable original reading, for all possibilities are accompanied by their own set of questions to be addressed. Furthermore, the fact that vowel pointing in poetry is a little more “flexible” increases the difficulty.

It seems to me that v. 2a carries a sense of timelessness, a sense that I would expect to be paralleled by an imperfect verb in v. 2b. In the former the Lord’s majestic name has an implied stative quality, so the passive or causative sense (e.g. with a Niph. vb.) doesn’t seem to parallel as well.

I would be interested to find out if a poetical form of הִנָּה (“to recount, rehearse”) could produce the word (or similar) found in the K.

I suppose that, since a choice must be made, I would opt for the first proposed reading, translating the phrase in question lit. as “who is given/placed/set,” with a final rendering of v. 2b, “whose splendor is placed/set above/upon the heavens.” As stated above, I do not care for the passive sense, for I feel that it should be a stative concept, but I can take a degree of comfort in this being poetic and the possibility that it is the Lord that places His own splendor in that rightfully deserved lofty place.

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