

[1] O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is

your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

1

[2] Out of the mouth of babes and infants,

you have established strength because of

2

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.

1

[6] You have given him dominion over the

works of your hands; you have put all things

under his feet,

2

[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!

How to Study a Psalm

1. Pigeonhole the psalm:

a. Tremper Longman's "Genres of the Psalms"

- i. Hymn: psalms of exuberant praise (Psalm 103)
- ii. Lament: psalms of distress, complaint (Psalm 88)
- iii. Thanksgiving: similar to hymns, but offers praise because of answer to a lament (Psalm 18)
- iv. Confidence: proclaiming trust in the Lord (Psalm 11)
- v. Remembrance: Reminds of the history of God's people or of important events (Psalm 106)
- vi. Wisdom: Describes how to live our lives, often contrasting two ways or choices (Psalm 47)
- vii. Kingship: Deals with the king, either the earthly king (Psalm 20) or God as king (Psalm 47)

b. What kind of psalm is this? Mainly a hymn with some kingship elements.

2. Be leery of reading yourself into the psalm too quickly:

Because many of us have asked the central question of vs. 3-4 in the context of how could God love us with our sins, we assume this psalm is about sin. But there is nothing about sin in this psalm. The contrast is not between a holy God and sinful man, but a majestic, powerful, and authoritative creator and the pathetic, weak, and dependent creature.

3. Look for context clues of when and why the psalm was written:

Vs. 2 speaks of the strength given to defeat enemies, indicates this was written following some kind of victory. Vs. 3 demonstrates this was written in response to being overwhelmed by the vastness of the night sky. If the universe is so much bigger than the psalmist, then how much bigger is the God who made it?

4. Look at the structure of the psalm:

a. Does any structural element stand out immediately:

Yes. The first line and the last are the same.

b. Look for shifts in person, number, voice, or form to develop outline:

- i. First, there is the shift between the formulaic intro and the rest of the psalm and then also before the outro.
- ii. Then there is a shift in form between vs. 2 and 3. 1b and 2 are statements of evidence about God's majesty. Vss. 3 and 4 are a question.
- iii. Then there is a shift in form between vs. 4 and 5. Again, vss 3 and 4 are a question. Vss. 5-8 are statements of evidence about God's care for man.

- c. Look for parallel structure elements:
 - i. We've already noticed the intro and outro.
 - ii. Having noticed the shifts in the poem, it becomes apparent that there is a central question in the psalm (boxed in red). Before and after the central question are statements of evidence about God. Vs. 1b is a statement of evidence about God's majesty. Vs. 2 is another. Then there is the central question. Vs. 5 is a statement of evidence about God's care for man. Vss. 6-8 is another.
 - iii. Having seen these structural elements, we can develop a structural outline for the entire psalm

Outline for Psalm:

- I. Intro: God is majestic (1a)
- II. Evidence of God's majesty (1b-2)
 - a. Evidence 1: God's is glory above the heavens (1b)
 - b. Evidence 2: Established strength in babies to defeat foes (2)
- III. Central Question: What is man? (3-4)
- IV. Evidence of God's care for man (5-8)
 - a. Evidence 1: God gave man glory, making him a little lower than "elohiyim" (5)
 - b. Evidence 2: God gave man dominion over God's creation (6-8)
- V. Outro: God is majestic (9)

- iv. Having developed the outline, notice that I and V are the same. II and IV are the same. That puts III smack in the middle by itself. That is why I continually refer to it as a "Central Question". The repeated intro and outro demonstrate this psalm is all about the majesty of God. And it is held in contrast with the central question of what is man in comparison.
- d. Look for parallel or contrasting words, phrases, concepts: (These are highlighted with colored circles and underlines connected by dashed lines. It's a bit messy, but gives a visual map of the psalm)

i. Things belonging to God: "Your..."

- ii. **Things God has done: "You have..."**
- iii. **"Glory"-God's (1b) and given to man (5)**
- iv. **God's glory is "above" (1b) the glory give to man is "a little lower" (5)**
- v. **"heavens" (1b) and "heavenly beings" (5)**
- vi. **God "established strength" (2) and God "given him dominion" (6)**
- vii. **"crowned" man with glory (5) and put all things under his "feet" (6)—blessed man from "head to toe"**

- e. Look for Parallelism/Couplings: English poetry often has rhyming words; Hebrew poetry has rhyming thoughts in "coupled" lines. There are three main kinds:ⁱⁱ
 - i. A=B: A and B are interchangeable, either echoing (Matthew 11:30) or contrasting (Proverbs 11:20)
 - ii. A>B: A states the main idea while B qualifies it (Psalm 111:6)
 - iii. A<B: A introduces a thought that is not complete without B (Psalm 103:13)
 - iv. Are there any of these couplings in Psalm 8?
 - 1. Vs. 2: A<B
 - 2. Vs. 3: A=B
 - 3. Vs. 4: A=B
 - 4. Vs. 5: A>B
 - 5. Vs. 6-8: A=B; B>C,D,E,F (The psalmist stretches this "coupling" beyond two lines, but the four extra lines (C,D,E,F) all qualify the second line (B))
- 5. Examine Key Words: Keywords are repeated words, words that are used in special ways, words on which the meaning of the psalm hinges. Keywords I see are:
 - a. LORD vs. Lord: Israel's covenant name for God vs. the more generic title of lordship
 - b. Our: Plural voice. This psalm is not an individual meditation, but a congregational hymn
 - c. Majestic: might, power, nobility
 - d. Earth: Though using Israel's covenant name for God, His majesty is over the whole earth.
 - e. Glory: honor, worth, value
 - f. Babies and infants: Not talking about literal babies and infants, but parallel to the men to whom God has given dominion. We are the babies and infants God has granted strength in order to overcome His enemies.

- g. Foes, enemy, avenger: God's foes. Not simply ours.
 - h. Heavens: skies, as seen created in Genesis
 - i. Man/son of man: Humans (though taken to refer ultimately to Jesus by the Hebrew writer in Hebrews)
 - j. Heavenly beings: Elohiym-Same word translated "God" in Genesis 1:1.
 - k. Dominion: Power, rule, reign. God does not exercise tyrannical rule, nor grants it. Rather, He grants servant leadership, stewardship rule.
6. Consider the Old Testament context: Are there any phrases or concepts that come from other places in the Old Testament?
- a. Yes: Vss. 6-8 come directly from Genesis 1:26. This is interesting since the term for "heavenly beings" in Psalm 8:5 is the same used in Genesis 1:27 saying man was made in the image of "God"
7. Having pigeonholed and examined the context, structure, and keywords of the psalm, what lessons do you learn:
- a. God is majestic; man is pathetic (we are but babies and infants)
 - b. God is majestic because of what He has done for man:
 - i. God has allowed man to be part of His plan to overcome enemies, avengers, and foes
 - ii. God has given man glory and honor by making him a little lower than heavenly beings
 - iii. God has given man dominion over His creation
 - c. What is man? We are what God has made us
 - d. Everything we have accomplished, every foe we have beaten, every victory we have had is because of God's power, not our own.
 - e. God has not given us this grace and blessing just for us to enjoy, but for us to accomplish His purposes:
 - i. To overcome His enemies.
 - ii. To be stewards of His creation
 - f. There are plenty of psalms that contrast our sinfulness with God's holiness. But that is not what this psalm is about. This psalm is about God's greatness and our smallness, God's majestic nature and our pathetic nature, God's

independence and our dependence; God's strength and our weakness; God's authority and our need for submission; God's grace and our surrender. We are but babies and infants. We cannot boast in our victories, but give God the thanks for granting victory through us.

8. Having determined the meaning in the original Old Testament context, we need to turn to potential New Covenant/Messianic meaning. Does the New Testament reference or quote the psalm? If so, how is it used? Is it given a greater meaning in the context of Christ?:
- a. Matthew 21:16—Jesus uses the Septuagint version of Psalm 8:2 to defend the children praising Him as the Son of David—If David demonstrates that all men are "children" that God uses for His purposes, how much more literal children?
 - b. Hebrews 2:6-8—The Hebrew writer definitely takes the entire psalm to a Messianic level, demonstrating there is a New Covenant meaning behind this psalm beyond just the meaning in the Old Testament context. The ultimate fulfillment of this psalm is about Jesus, crowned by God to overcome the enemy on our behalf. Though He is divine, the Son of Man took on flesh, made a little lower than "elohiym" and was granted dominion over all of God's works. This calls to mind I Corinthians 15:27 (another passage that quotes Psalm 8). It also brings to mind Matthew 28:18 and Ephesians 1:22-23. Jesus' dominion goes beyond the "sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field." His dominion is over the sheep of God's fold in the church. But He also has dominion over all the earth and eventually all will bow to Him.

ⁱ How to Read the Psalms, Tremper Longman III, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1988, pp 24-34. (Remember that there is no inspired delineation of the genres of the psalms. This is merely a tool we use to help easily categorize the psalms and understand the meaning of the psalms. So we'll see some overlap and sometimes struggle to definitively pigeonhole some psalms.)

ⁱⁱ Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, William Klein, Craig Blomberg, Robert Hubbard, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2004, pp 289-297.