**Psalm 8** - 8/21/2022

**Part 1 The Nature of the Psalm**

What kind of literature is this?

Psalms are poetry. And this one is labeled as lyrics for music, intended by David for singing.

As a songwriter myself, I love to craft lyrics with a poetic style that makes them enjoyable, interesting.

It’s unfortunate that song lyrics don’t translate well from one language to another. My friend Sam Poe, who learned Spanish and then pioneered and pastored a church in Mexico, told me he never tried to translate songs between English and Spanish because it never came out well - always awkward.

But it’s fortunate, a blessing, that Hebrew poetry features a technique that translates quite well into other languages. What is that? It’s called “parallelism”, where an idea is repeated in different words to illuminate and intensify the expression.

What parallelism do you find in Psalm 8?

Psalm 8 is notable because it ends exactly as it begins. This poetic technique is called an “inclusio”, or sometimes an “envelope”. I did a quick survey of the other psalms, and noticed Ps 103 starts and ends with “Praise the Lord, O my soul”, Ps 118 starts and ends with “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” And I noted ten others that start and end with the Hebrew “*Hallelujah*”, which of course means “praise the Lord”.

**Part 2: Praise for the Creation**

Psalm 8 is a song of praise to God as the Creator, as *YAHWEH* our *Adonai*: YAHWEH is God’s holy name, and Adonai is his title of honor and authority. It seems to me that David had been meditating on Genesis 1 when he wrote this psalm. God’s name is great throughout the earth, among people scattered all across the continents. God prepared a big place for many nations to live, and …

**26** Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

**28** God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” **…**

**31** God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

We find parallelism in v1, where the praise of God’s name in all the earth is echoed and intensified by praise of his glory throughout the heavens. David elaborated on that concept when he wrote **Psalm 19**:

**1** The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

**2** Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

**…**

**4** Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

**Praise as spiritual battle**

Why does David seem to change the topic in v. 2?

**2** Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies,    to silence the foe and the avenger.

We can find frequent mention of contention with enemies in what is called “Book 1”, Psalms 1-41:

Psalm 2, for instance, asks:

“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together

against the Lord and against his Anointed One.”

Psalm 3 starts: “O Lord, how many are my foes!”

Other Psalms in this section mention:

* the way of the wicked
* the destruction of those who tell lies
* the rage of pursuing enemies

And of course Genesis 3 recounts how Adam and Eve faced the ultimate enemy when they were tempted in the garden. So the Bible is clear that there are many who stand in opposition to God’s purposes and his glory. When we encounter people in this state of rebellion, we are instructed to pray for them, show them kindness, and offer the best evidence and explanation of gospel good news.

But we also find ourselves in spiritual battles. Have aliens ever visited our planet? Yes, indeed. Sometimes the angels are obedient messengers from heaven, but sometimes they are rebels who despise God’s goodness.

Why would God use the lips of children and infants to silence the foe and the avenger?

1. It shows his power -- he had 32,000 men behind Gideon to battle the Midianite oppressors, but God chose to defeat them with an army of 300.
2. God uses the weakest among us to accomplish his work and display his glory. I’m not a bold extrovert or an articulate speaker, but God chooses me and many like me to spread the gospel. He certainly doesn’t need our feeble prayers, but he chooses to involve us to accomplish his will.
3. God welcomes powerless and unsophisticated people to bring him praise. At Jesus’ triumphal entry, when the chief priests and teachers of the law saw the wonderful things Jesus did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

**Mt 21:16** “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

[It’s worth noting that the phrase in the Masoretic Text is difficult to translate: the Septuagint translated Ps 8:2,

“... you have established **praise** …”

while it could also be literally rendered,

“... you have **established a bulwark** …” or a stronghold.]

What was God’s strategy when an army of Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against King Jehoshaphat in Jerusalem?

**2 Chron 20:12** [Jehoshaphat prayed] Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

**13** All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

**14** Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel … a descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

**15** He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. **16** Tomorrow march down against them. ... **17** You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.’”

**18** Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. **19** Then some Levites … stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

**20** Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” **21** After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to **sing to the Lord and to praise him** for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.”

**22** As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. **23** The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the [warriors] from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

There was nothing left for the people of Judah to do but collect the plunder and praise God for the victory! Ultimately we need to remember that the battle belongs to the Lord, and we are called to spiritually fight by giving thanks to the Lord for his unending love. Practically, when Satan tempts us to grumble and doubt God’s goodness, we can fight his temptation by choosing to praise God instead of complaining. May our hearts and homes be full of praise to the Lord!

**Praise for the moon and stars in place**

David continues his praise for God’s creative power and accomplishments in v. 3-4:

**3** When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

**4** what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

I love how the moon and the stars are placed. David was clearly not intending to teach about astronomy, but he does happen to mention it. And it’s worth considering the level of fine-tuning we find there:

Dr. Hugh Ross and his team at Reasons to Believe compiled a list of the parameters of a planet, its planetary companions, its moon, its star, and its galaxy must have values falling within narrowly defined ranges for biological life of any kind to exist.

**1. galaxy cluster type**

if too rich: galaxy collisions and mergers would disrupt solar orbit

if too sparse: insufficient infusion of gas to sustain star formation for a long enough time

**2. galaxy size**

if too large: infusion of gas and stars would disturb the sun’s orbit and ignite too many galactic eruptions.

if too small: insufficient infusion of gas to sustain star formation for long enough time.

**3. galaxy type**

if too elliptical: star formation would cease before sufficient heavy element build-up for life chemistry.

if too irregular: radiation exposure on occasion would be too severe and heavy elements for life chemistry would not be available.

**4. galaxy mass distribution**

if too much in the central bulge: life-supportable planet will be exposed to too much radiation.

if too much in the spiral arms: life-supportable planet will be destabilized by the gravity and radiation from adjacent spiral arms.

You get the idea -- if it’s your job one day to position the moon and the stars, you better be *very* careful or you’ll wipe out all the biological life on any planet in the galaxy, or galaxy cluster, or super-cluster. Such fine-tuning applies to other design parameters as well:

5. galaxy location

6. decay rate of cold dark matter particles

7. hypernovae eruptions

8. supernovae eruptions

9. white dwarf binaries

10. proximity of solar nebula to a supernova eruption

I know many of you would like to hear more of these design parameters, but the list goes on until it reaches 402, which is where they were in 2008, when they published this [edition](https://storage.googleapis.com/reasons-prod/files/compendium/compendium_part2.pdf). Since then, the number of these discoveries has not only increased -- the rate of discovery has increased, so that it’s even harder to keep up with. Do we have any volunteers to go help out with this database?

**When I consider … what is man that you care for him?**

You know that there’s a “goldilocks” zone of a planet revolving around a star—not too hot or too cold—where water can exist in liquid form. Of course the zone can be wider for unicellular, low metabolism life that persists for only a brief time period, but for sustaining human life on a planet for few hundred thousand years—long enough to get a population of people who care to join the great multitude in Revelation 7 that no one can count, “from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” -- this takes a far greater amount of fine tuning.

The chances of getting all these constants right is one in a trillion trillion trillion… just incomprehensible.

**Fred Hoyle**, Astronomer: "*A superintellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as with the chemistry and biology.*"

**Paul Davies**, Physicist: "*The laws (of physics) seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design…There is for me powerful evidence that something is going on behind it all. It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature’s numbers to make the Universe... The impression of design is overwhelming.*"

**George Greenstein**, Astronomer: "*As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural … Agency must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?*”

So David’s question may be deeper than he intended -- what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

The **anthropic principle**, also known as the "observation selection effect", is the hypothesis that there is a restrictive lower bound on how statistically probable our observations of the universe are, because observations could only happen in a universe capable of developing intelligent life. This "puddle analogy" was originally expressed by Douglas Adams:

imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, “This is an interesting world I find myself in -- an interesting hole I find myself in -- fits me rather neatly, doesn’t it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!”

Philosopher William Lane Craig summarizes this as:

appealing to a self-selection effect in order to eliminate surprise at what one observes, however improbable. The anthropomorphized puddle can be surprised at its own existence only if the hole exists. So it shouldn’t be surprised by how well the hole and it fit. If the hole were not there, the puddle would not exist to be surprised about it.

This analogy fails, however, because any hole will do for a puddle. Any universe will not do for life. Life is not a fluid. It will not adjust to any old universe.

Likewise, consider someone condemned to execution by firing squad. He’s blindfolded, he hears the shots, but miraculously, all of the marksmen missed! Should he be surprised though? Of course he’s still alive -- otherwise he wouldn’t be standing there to observe the bullet holes all around his body. Nothing to marvel at here -- but does the fact that he’s alive to observe explain how all the executioners missed when they fired?

There are materialistic explanations for the state of the world and the presence of biological life, but they appeal to improbabilities and undiscovered possibilities. David was not intending to make an astrophysics assertion that a super-intellect who transcends the universe is responsible for setting the moon and stars in place. But he does make that statement in a subordinate clause, and it provides a solid basis for doing good science.

If you want to launch a Scientific Revolution, do you teach your students that the universe is a product of

1) multiple gods creating in competition with one another,

2) blind, unguided chance, or

3) the deliberate, careful work of a supreme being who loves us enough to orchestrate every detail from galaxy superclusters to atomic subparticles?

It was the confidence that the universe was created in an orderly and comprehensible manner that spurred many early pioneers of science. And that same confidence that God has created a good and orderly world for us to discover and use can motivate us today in our research and work.

**The rule of humanity over the animals**

When he made Adam and Eve,

**28** God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

God spoke the animal and plant kingdoms into being. But with humans, he got personally involved, and used his hands, and breathed life into the man’s nostrils.

The Bible teaches that there’s a distinct difference between humans and other animals, not just in degree of intellect, but in our unique spiritual role representing God “in his image”.

It’s fortunate that we share physical traits with animals. My mom has a healthy heart these days because she had a valve transplant from a pig. We can do lab studies with mice that help us assess whether treatments are safe for humans. I believe that the commonality of DNA across species makes it possible for us to study biology and practice medicine. So God has put everything under our feet, and we are called to take good care of the animals entrusted to our care. Right?

**All things under his feet**

But this verse applies in a unique way to one man in particular. In Hebrews 2:6-9 we read:

There is a place where someone has testified:

“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

**7** You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor

**8** and put everything under his feet.”

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. **9** But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

David may not have been aware that he was prophesying about the coming Messiah, but Paul realized that David was when he was writing in 1 Cor 15, about the resurrection of Christ:

**25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death. **27** For he “has put everything under his feet.”[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+cor+15&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28746c)] ... **28** When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Humanity failed to represent God faithfully as good stewards of his creation; Adam and Eve and each one of us chose sin and rebellion and worshiped the created things above the Creator, and so creation was cursed into frustration. But Jesus, though in nature fully God, humbled himself below the angels to become fully human and bear the curse of sin that we each deserved.

Because he humbled himself to the lowest place—the bloody cross—God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name. And Jesus offers those who trust in him to share in his glory and his rule (Rev 3:21). The author of Hebrews encourages believers, “It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking” (Heb 2:5). No; it is the redeemed humanity—all who trust in Christ Jesus—who are heirs of the coming kingdom. Therefore, in light of such grace, let us never cease to praise our amazing God and thereby war against the devil. Praise God for his unfathomably intricate creation! And praise God for his crucified, risen, and exalted Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: Lord Jesus, how majestic is your name in all the earth!