

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

moved up from the head of the next psalm (where its appropriateness was not evident) to the foot of this, in conformity with Dr. Thirtle's readjustment of the psalm-titles,—should so fully vindicate its new position. "The Wine-presses," reminding us of the complete ingathering of the fruits of the year, serve at once directly to anticipate the closing of Jehovah's retributive dealings with men, and at the same time to lead on to such Scriptures as Isa. 63:1-6, Joel 3:12-17, and Rev. 19:15, where this solemn subject is more fully set forth.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are various ways God might use in saving us from our persecutors—mention three different examples.
2. There are various ways we can overcome evil with good—read the Sermon on the Mount—(Matthew 5-7) and discuss three of them.
3. Discuss two or three possible reasons for the delays in the judgments of God.
4. Are we to be perfectly confident that truth and justice will prevail in this life?
5. Sin has the seeds of self destruction in it. Show by two examples that this is true.

## PSALM 8

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Jehovah's Majesty Exalted by means of Man's Dominion.

### ANALYSIS

An Original Solo, vers. 3-8: Adapted to Temple Worship by Prelude and Refrain, vers. 1a, b, and 9, and by an Introductory Stanza, vers. 1c, 2.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah our Sovereign Lord!  
how wonderful is thy name in all the earth!  
Because thy majesty hath been uplifted above<sup>1</sup> the heavens

1. So Sep.

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- 2 Out of the mouth of children and sucklings hast thou founded  
a stronghold,  
on account of thine adversaries,—  
to silence<sup>1</sup> foe and avenger.<sup>2</sup>
- 3 When I view thy heavens the work<sup>3</sup> of thy fingers,  
moon and stars which thou hast established
- 4 What was weak man that thou shouldst think of him,  
or the son of the earth-born that thou shouldst set him in  
charge;<sup>4</sup>
- 5 And shouldst make<sup>5</sup> him but little less than messengers  
divine,<sup>6</sup>  
yea with glory and state shouldst crown him;
- 6 Shouldest give him dominion over the works of thy hands,—  
all things shouldst have put under his feet:—
- 7 cattle small and large—all of them,—  
yea even the beasts of the field,—<sup>7</sup>
- 8 the bird of the heavens and the fishes of the sea,—  
whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
- 9 Jehovah our Sovereign Lord!  
how wonderful is thy name in all the earth!

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) 'L M T H L B N = prob. "Maidens to a youth":  
pos. "concerning the death of the champion":  
pos. "concerning the white death = leprosy."

## PARAPHRASE

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O Lord our God, the majesty and glory of Your name fills  
all the earth and overflows the heavens.

2 You have taught the little children to praise You perfectly.  
May their example shame and silence Your enemies!

3 When I look up into the night skies and see the work of  
Your fingers—the moon and the stars You have made—

1. Or: "destroy."

2. Cp. 44:16.

3. So the Eastern Massorites; but the Western (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.):  
"works" (pl.)—Gn.

4. Cp. Num. 3:10, 27:16, Jer. 49:19, 50:44.

5. For tense see Heb. of Job 7:18 and Ps. 144:3.

6. Heb. 'elohim: as in 82:1, 97:7.

7. Or: "plain."

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4 I cannot understand how You can bother with mere puny man, to pay any attention to him!

5 And yet You have made him only a little lower than the angels,<sup>1</sup> and placed a crown of glory and honor upon his head.

6 You have put him in charge of everything you made; everything is put under his authority:

7 All sheep and oxen, and wild animals too,

8 The birds and fish, and all the life in the sea.

9 O Jehovah, our Lord, the majesty and glory of Your name fills the earth.

## EXPOSITION

The reason for resolving the chief part of this psalm (vers. 3-8) into a Solo, is written upon its face, by the appearance of the personal pronoun *I*. From that point onward, the strain runs on breathlessly, as a single magnificent sentence, to the end, where the voice of the soloist is hushed in the renewed acclaim of the united congregation, in which, for a second time, the whole people adoringly address *Jehovah as our Sovereign Lord*. The introductory stanza (vers. 1c., 2), interposed between the prelude and the solo, is in any case special, and indeed remarkably unique: probably imparting to the whole psalm its deepest prophetic import.

In attributing the solo to David's early shepherd days, there is no need to overlook the analogical argument so beautifully put by Delitzsch, in favour of not dating the finished production of the psalm earlier than that momentous day on which the Spirit of Prophecy came upon the youthful harpist. "Just as the Gospels contain no discourses delivered by our Lord previous to his baptism in the Jordan, and the Canon of the New Testament contains no writings of the Apostles dating from the time before Pentecost, so the Canon of the Old Testament contains no Psalms of David that were composed by him prior to his anointing. Not till after he is the anointed of the God of Jacob does he become the sweet singer of Israel, upon whose tongue is the word of Jahve (2 Sam. 23:1, 2)." Already, therefore, even in this early psalm, may we regard its composer as "a prophet," carried away into things to come by the Holy Spirit of insight, foresight and wisdom.

1. Or, "only a little lower than God!"

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The Solo gives a night-view of the *heavens*, in their vastness stability and splendour; which would have made *weak man*, by contrast, seem small and evanescent, but for the recollection of his creation and destiny as revealed in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, with the great words of which the poet's mind was manifestly filled. Creation, seen in one of her most lovely moods, and the Creation Story, recalled in one of its most suggestive features, are, so to speak, the alphabet employed by the Illuminating Spirit to quicken the psalmist's mind. That the scene is a night-scene, naturally follows from the absence of the sun; and is confirmed by the fact that the blaze of the sun by day renders the heavens as a whole practically invisible; whereas, here, not only are the heavens scanned with lingering delight, but their minute and variegated beauties call forth admiration of the skill of the Divine Artist's *fingers*. Nevertheless, vastness is here, as the poet's eye sweeps the whole heavens; and permanence, as he recalls how many times he has gazed at the same spectacle, and his ancestors before him have been similarly delighted: and so his mind is carried back to the Creation Story, to realize how abiding are *moon and stars* which Jehovah has *established* in the heavens. The first effect of this midnight survey of the heavens is to make man appear *weak* and short-lived. *Because I see this, or when I see it afresh, I am moved to exclaim—What is weak man—what the son of the earth-born that thou shouldst remember him, visit him, set him in charge over this lower world?* And so, by the aid of the Creation Story, a reaction is induced in the poet's mind; and there come into view Man's capacity, charge, dignity, destiny. After all, such a responsible being cannot be wholly weak and short-lived.

Besides: to "weak man" succeeds *a son of man*, for Adam is not only an individual, but a race; and it is to the race, as such, that the charge to wield dominion is given: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,—and have dominion." The earth is to be filled and subdued in order to the exercise of dominion. Therefore the commission is to the race; and this alone justifies the conclusion that the allusion to the first chapter of Genesis begins with verse 4 of our psalm, and not merely with verse 5 as some critics have thought.

With such a charge laid upon him, to rule inferior creatures, Man appears to be *little less than the messengers divine*, here termed in Hebrew *'elohim*, a word of wider applicability than our English word "God" when spelled with a capital initial; as will

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appear from an examination of Exo. 21:6, 22:8, 9, 28, and Ps. 82:1, 2, 6, 7. If, as appears from these passages, human judges, as representing the Divine Judge, could be called *'elohim*; much more may heavenly messengers have been so named in this place; and, to them, accordingly, we conclude that reference is here made.

Whether the *crowning* of Man *with glory and state*, when he was visited and installed into office, imports the bestowment on him of any visible splendour calculated to strike his animal subjects with reverence and challenge at once their submission, we are not plainly told; and yet the discovery of the "nakedness" which made man "ashamed" after his transgression may, not unnaturally, be deciphered as suggesting something more akin to an actual disrobing than the inner consciousness of disobedience alone.

It is probably of greater importance to connect with Man's commission to govern this lower world his possession of the Divine Image: "Let us make man in our image . . . and (qualified by that endowment) let him have dominion." It is the Image bestowed which qualifies for the Dominion assigned. This consideration ought probably to go a long way towards settling the question: Wherein consisted that Image? If we could only be content to derive our answer from the First of Genesis, that answer might stand thus: The Image of God in which man was created was his capacity to rule—his capacity to rule over and care for beings beneath himself. It cannot be denied that God possessed that capacity: that it was His glory and honour to know his subjects, to appraise their powers, to foresee their needs, and to provide with an unspeakably gracious goodwill (145:16) for the due and orderly satisfaction of every propensity with which he himself had endowed them. If so, it cannot be denied that the bestowment of the same capacity on man would render him God-like just to the degree to which he came to possess it. It is surely to some extent confirmatory of this, to note the seeming pride with which the psalmist lingers on the extent of Man's realm, in the several orders of which it is composed, and the several areas in which his subjects dwell. Indeed, the apparent inclusion of wild animals under the terms *beasts of the field* or *plain*, and the comprehension of *birds* and *fishes*, to say nothing of *the monsters of the deep*, as all placed under Man's dominion, go to show that so vast a kingdom needs a God-like king; and to raise the question, whether Man ought not

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to be able to wield a wider and more potent control over his subjects than he is now seen to possess. In any case, Man was originally majestically crowned; and if to any extent he has lost his dominion, it can scarcely be that he has lost it for ever. To assume that he has, would afford a poor prospect of *silencing* for ever the *foe and the avenger*.

This reference reminds us that Stanza I (vers. 1c, 2) now demands our patient attention. The attachment of the third line of the psalm to this stanza, as its introduction, is presumably correct; inasmuch as we can scarcely think that the prelude of the psalm and its final refrain were not meant to be identical. If so, the precise form which this third line should assume and the meaning it should bear, become all the more important when it is seen to be the very base on which the charming "child and suckling" stanza is made to rest. Critics are nearly agreed that some word or letter has gone wrong in this line; and we should be content implicitly to follow Dr. Ginsburg's lead in emending it by reference to Num. 27:20, save for the difficulty of seeing any comparison whatever between the putting by Moses of some of his majesty on Joshua and the putting by Jehovah of his majesty on the heavens. Under these circumstances, while gladly accepting the suggestion of Ginsburg and others by restoring the word *nathatta* out of the seemingly broken fragment *tenah* of the M.T., we would prefer to follow the Septuagint, which reads, as we think, with profound significance: *Because thy majesty hath been uplifted above the heavens*. The preciousness of the result, by heightening the prophetic significance of the whole psalm, must be our excuse for detaining the reader on a point so critical.

Advancing at once to the broad meaning of the introductory stanza when thus emended, we remark: That we are thus warranted in concluding, that it is in some way this very uplifting of Jehovah's majesty into the heavens, which makes way for the ministry of children; and that at least the ministry of children is to assist in *silencing the foe and avenger* whose existence is so singularly introduced into this psalm at its very head and front. It cannot be denied that he is here brought forward with a circumstantiality which is positively startling. For first there is a general reference to Jehovah's *adversaries*, as furnishing a reason for the Divine procedure of preparing the mighty ministry of children's praise, which praise is made the foundation of a bulwark which Jehovah rears in the midst

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of his foes. That is the general statement; which is then particularised by the more specific assertion of the result expected to follow from the testimony of infant voices. So that, in fact, we are here confronted with a *company of adversaries*; headed, as it would seem, by *one foe* in particular, who is not only a foe but an *avenger*, with vengeance in his heart; as though he had a wrong to redress, and injury real or supposed to resent by retaliation. Such is the natural and proper force and setting of the words. It is a conceivable state of things: a band of adversaries, with a champion foe and avenger at their head. Even as, in the early days of David—probably not far from the time when this psalm was written—the Philistines were “the adversaries” of Israel, and of Israel’s God, Jehovah; and then there stood forth, at the head of those adversaries, and in their name, a foe and avenger, by name Goliath: who, indeed, by a well-aimed blow from David’s sling was for ever *silenced* in death. This is not to say, that such an incident could by any means fill out the words before us; but only that we may do well to seize the words in their proper force and full significance. Jehovah has adversaries: at their head is a chieftain, who is determined, resentful and relentless. He is to be silenced. Children are to be employed to close his mouth. Their weapons will be their words. Jehovah founds a tower of strength in their words; which, presumably—as the Septuagint interprets—will be words of “praise.” Children praise Jehovah for his majesty. His majesty is seen in creation, on which and through which glimpses of it are seen. His name—that is the revelation of his power, wisdom, and goodness in creation—fills the whole earth. This revelation is already an objective reality: the moon-and-star-lit heavens are stretched forth over all the earth. Wherever the sons of the earth-born tread, they find above them the same eloquent heavens. The Maker of the stars above is the Creator of the flowers beneath. The tokens of God fill all the earth. But this objective revelation has not yet become subjective. The wonderful fact of Jehovah’s creatorship has not yet been translated into the worshipful feeling of adoration and gratitude in all the earth. Until this is realised, the very refrain of this psalm is unfulfilled prophecy. Jehovah does not receive back “the fullness of all the earth” as “his glory” (Isa. 6:3) so long as “man is vile.” Adversaries to Jehovah abound; his foe is at large; and his friends are much in the position of a beleaguered fortress.

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But the process of fulfillment has received an auspicious beginning. In one sense, Jehovah's glory was uplifted into the heavens when Man fell into disobedience. In another, and a redemptive sense, it is receiving a new and more wonderful elevation in Jesus as the Son of Man. This elevation was inaugurated by the resurrection, ascension and coronation in heaven of the Man Christ Jesus. And, on earth, *children* have begun to sing their hosannahs with new point and with adoring ecstasy. They not only know how to wonder at the stars, but they are learning from generation to generation to love the Man who died for them and rose again. By-and-by, when the Lord of Life has glorified his Suffering Assembly and presented it before the heavenly throne, the process of *uplifting Jehovah's majesty above the heavens* will be complete, and the whole earth will be filled with a bright reflection of his glory. The adversaries of Jehovah are doomed to defeat. Their Champion—the Adversary—the *Foe and Avenger* of this psalm—has met with his equal. But the process of silencing the Enemy is moral before it is physical. Hence the more than symbolic employment of infants' tongues to silence the Devil. The victory will be earned by Self-sacrificing Love before it is confirmed and consummated by expelling and destroying power. The Foe hates children; and has had good reason, ever since the promise came that the Seed of the Woman should bruise the Serpent's head. The child-spirit of humble and trustful love will yet finally and for ever *silence the Foe and Avenger*.

David may well have felt himself to have been a mere *child* when he went forth to meet Goliath; and his son Hezekiah must have been possessed of much of the childlike spirit, when he quietly rested in Jerusalem, waiting for the overthrow of Sennacherib. Whether the introductory stanza of this psalm was written by the one or the other of these psalmists, the Spirit of God has by its means turned this Shepherd's lay into a psalm as far-reaching as it is beautiful, dramatic and above all instructive as to the ways of Jehovah with men.

The possible concurrence of meanings decipherable in the musical instruction now moved to the foot of this psalm are so astounding as almost to pass belief: and we are quite content with the first named as abundantly sufficient. Those who are prepared for further cryptic meanings can discreetly ponder how much further they may wisely go.



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by the use of the word "glory" as in verse 1?
2. Discuss examples of how God chose the weak to confound the strong—the ignorant to confound the wise.
3. Are we to understand that man without the revelation of the spoken or written Word of God can by his own perception discover God's greatness and goodness? Cf. Rom. 1:20 ff.
4. By looking through a telescope man becomes smaller and of less and less importance—what can change this concept?
5. Are animals "naturally" afraid of man or does man need to earn his supremacy over animals—discuss. Remember: dominion over animals does not mean destruction of them.
6. Discuss in what manner God has created man just a little lower than angels.

PSALM 9, 10

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Kingship of Jehovah in Zion Finally Triumphant over a League between the Nations and the Lawless One.

ANALYSIS

These two psalms are bound together as originally one, chiefly by the remains of a set of Alphabetical Initials beginning the former psalm and extending into the latter, and by Coincidences of Language which cannot be regarded as accidental; and yet the feeling of the Compound Psalm so completely changes as to reveal Two Distinct Situations,—the one suited to the time of David after a decisive victory over his enemies, and the other strikingly fitted for Hezekiah's peculiar trials due to the Assyrian Invasion. For an attempt to trace these changes, see "Exposition." The Remains of the Alphabetical Acrostic are as follow: *aleph*, vers. 1, 2, four times; *beth*, ver. 3, once; *gimel*, ver. 5, once; *he*, ver. 6, once; *waw*, vers. 7, 8, 9, 10, four times; *zain*, ver. 11, once; *beth*, ver. 13, once; *teth*, ver. 15, once; *yod*, ver. 17, once; *koph* (? for *kaph*), ver. 19, once; *lamed*, 10:1, once; *koph*, 10:12, once; *resh*, 10:14, once; *shin*, 10:15, once; *tau*, 10:17, once.

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(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 I would fain thank Jehovah with all my heart,  
I would tell of all thy wondrous works: