

Psalms of Orientation (Psalm 8)

Summary: After establishing two foundational realities in Psalms 1 (God is good) and Psalm 2 (God is sovereign), the psalmist immediately plunges us into another reality in the five psalms that follow. It is a world of enemies, falsehood, injustice, moral failure, and sickness. How can both of these realities coexist and what do we do when we find ourselves disoriented by them? We turn to a psalm of orientation – Psalm 8. This psalm focuses on mankind and our place in the cosmos. It turns out that we are at the center of it all. The psalmist is incredulous that the LORD would consider human beings at all given the beauty and scale of the universe. And yet He has, making Him worthy of our worship.

Notes:

ORIENTATION AND DISORIENTATION

- Psalms of Disorientation (lament): Psalms 3-7 (enemies, illness, injustice) “How many are my foes? How long will you turn my glory into shame?”
- Psalms of Orientation: Psalm 1 (God is good), 2 (God is sovereign), 8 (God is creator of a good world and co-ruler with mankind) “How majestic is your name!”

KEY POINTS

- The ABCBA chiastic structure of Psalm 8 places mankind at the heart of God’s purpose
- “O YHWH, our Lord” - the divine name YHWH is indicated in English translations by LORD (all caps), the title *adonai* (lord, master) is indicated by the English word “Lord” (lowercase). His name and majesty frame the psalm.
- From the vast heavens to tiny infants, God’s glory is on display, leaving us speechless
- God is revealed as an artist (“the work of your fingers”)
- Mankind was made a little lower than *elohim* (the mighty ones, angels), created in the image of God (*imago dei*).
- God gave mankind authority to rule over the three domains of creation: earth, sky and water
- Jesus fulfills this psalm, being made “a little lower than the angels”, tasting death for us, and becoming the second Adam. The first Adam “broke” creation when he fell, failing in his purpose, but the second Adam restored it (Hebrews 2:5-9).

WORLDVIEW QUESTIONS

- This psalm answers the four major questions that a worldview must answer:
 - Origin: How did we get here? Where did we come from?
 - Identity: Who are we? What does it mean to be human?
 - Purpose: Is there meaning to life? What is our purpose?
 - Destiny: What happens when we die? Is this all that there is?

Discussion:

1. In what way has God established strength (or “ordained praise”) from the mouths of infants? How does this silence the enemy and avenger? (Matt. 21:16)
2. How is God’s glory displayed in the heavens? On the earth? (Give some examples.)
3. What evidence is there that God cares about creation? About human beings?
4. What does this psalm have to say about the value and dignity of every human being, especially children?
5. How does this psalm answer each of the four worldview questions?
6. What does it mean to “rule over the works of your hands”? How does this psalm inform our approach to environmental stewardship?