

PSALM 8

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 8

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, a Psalm of David

Some think this psalm was composed when the ark was brought to the house of Obededom the Gittite; and that it was delivered to him and his sons, as others were to Asaph, to Jeduthun, to the sons of Korah, etc. ^{f131}. But against this lies a strong objection, that Obededom and his sons were porters, and not singers, (~~130~~ 1 Chronicles 26:4,15); and for the same reason “gittith” cannot be the name of a musical instrument which was kept in his family, and presided over by them ^{f132}. Some are of opinion this word had its name from Gath; and that this psalm was wrote by David when he was there ^{f133}; or that it is the name of a musical instrument invented and made there, and which was brought from thence ^{f134}: And so the Targum paraphrases it;

“upon the harp which was brought from Gath.”

A word like this signifies “winepresses”: and hence the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Ethiopic versions, render it “for the winepresses”: which Theodoret interprets of churches, where Christ the true vine is gathered by believers, and they prepare the mystic wine. Some think ^{f135} the psalms which bear this name were composed for the feast of tabernacles: when, having got in their vintage, they filled their presses, and squeezed their grapes, and therefore gave thanks; it was usual, even with the Heathens ^{f136}, to make use of the harp, and other instruments of music, at the gathering of the grapes to be squeezed and pressed. Some of the Jewish writers ^{f137} apply it to the times of Edom’s destruction, who was to be trodden down as in a winepress, foretold in (~~261~~ Isaiah 63:1-3); and others interpret it of the times of Gog and Magog, when the prophecy in (~~293~~ Joel 3:13); shall be fulfilled ^{f138} and some have thought this psalm to be a song of praise, like one of those sung by them that tread in the winepress; the time of vintage being a time of joy. The ancient Christian writers explain it of the sufferings of Christ, when he trod the winepress of his Father’s wrath. But the word “gittith” is either the first word of some song, as Aben Ezra thinks; or the

name of the tune, as Kimchi; or rather of the musical instrument to which this psalm was set and sung. Though the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, (^{<3116>}Hebrews 2:6); citing some passages from this psalm, only says, “one in a certain place testified”; without mentioning either the number of the psalm, or the name of the writer; yet it is certain that David was the penman of it: and both from the testimony of that writer, and from a citation of Christ himself, it is evident that the subject of this psalm is the Messiah, and that it belongs to his times; (see ^{<3116>}Hebrews 2:6-9 ^{<4215>}Matthew 21:15,16). So the Syriac scholiast;

“the eighth psalm is concerning Christ our Redeemer.”

Ver. 1. *O Lord our God*, etc.] Jehovah, the one God, who is Lord of all angels and men, and in an especial manner Lord and King of saints;

how excellent [is] thy name in all the earth! by the “name” of God is not meant any particular name of his, by which he is called; but either himself, his nature and perfections; or rather that by which he is made known, and particularly his Gospel; (see ^{<3176>}John 17:6 ^{<4415>}Acts 9:15); this is excellent in its nature, it being good news, and glad tidings of good things, which display the love, grace, mercy, and kindness of God to men, as well as his wisdom, power, truth, and faithfulness; and in the subject matter of it, Christ and his righteousness, and life and salvation by him, the spiritual blessings of grace it publishes, and the exceeding great and precious promises it contains; and in its usefulness for the enlightening, quickening, and converting sinners, and for the comforting and reviving of drooping saints. It is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, and excels the law in glory. It cannot well be said how glorious it is; it is marvellously excellent; and that “in all the earth”, being carried by the apostles, who were sent by Christ with it, into all the world; where it has shone out, and appeared gloriously to Gentiles as well as Jews. This clause shows that this is said by David prophetically of Gospel times; for not in his time, nor in any period under the Old Testament, was the name of the Lord glorious and excellent in all the earth. His name was great in Israel, but not in all the world. He showed his word, and gave his statutes and ordinances to Jacob; but as for the Gentiles, they were without them, and were strangers to the covenants of promise, (^{<3701>}Psalm 76:1,2 147:19,20 ^{<4012>}Ephesians 2:12); but this was true of the first times of the Gospel; and will be still more fully accomplished when the prophecies in (^{<3011>}Malachi 1:11 ^{<3849>}Zechariah 14:9); shall be fulfilled;

who hast set thy glory above the heavens: meaning his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the brightness of his glory; in whom is all the fulness of the Godhead, the glory of all the divine perfections; so called (^{<363>}Psalm 63:2 85:9); and the setting of him above the heavens designs the exaltation of him at the right hand of God; where angels, principalities, and powers, became subject to him, and he was made higher than the heavens, (^{<372>}Hebrews 7:26). And it was in consequence, and by virtue of this, that the Gospel was spread throughout the earth; for upon Christ's exaltation the Spirit was poured down upon the apostles, and they were endowed with gifts qualifying them to carry the Gospel into each of the parts of the world.

Ver. 2. *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings*, etc.] Not literally such, though the Jewish writers ^{f139} generally so understand it; as do some Christian interpreters, who explain it of the wonderful formation, nourishment, and growth of infants; and of the marvellous care of God in providing the breast for them; in filling it with milk, and teaching them to suck; which, being observed by men, occasion praise to God, to the confusion of atheists and infidels. But this is no other than what is common to brute creatures: rather the words are to be understood in a figurative sense. So Jarchi applies them to the priests and Levites in the temple: but it is best to interpret them of the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel; and of such who received it and professed it; who were in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, as babes and sucklings, (^{<412>}Matthew 11:25);

hast thou ordained strength: by which is meant the Gospel, the rod of Christ's strength, and the power of God unto salvation; and which being made useful for the conversion of souls, is the cause of much praise and thanksgiving to God: this, by the mouths and means of the apostles and first ministers of the word, God ordained, or "founded" ^{f140}, settled and established in the world, notwithstanding all the opposition made unto it; so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, to root it out of the world; but it will continue the everlasting Gospel;

because of thine enemies: either for the sake of subduing them, and bringing them to the obedience of Christ, that is, the elect of God, who are before conversion enemies to God and Christ; or rather for the sake of confounding the implacable enemies of God and Christ, and of the cause and interest of religion. In order to which God has made choice of

instruments the most mean and despicable, (~~4126~~1 Corinthians 1:26-28); and God's end in this more particularly is expressed in the following clause;

that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger; Satan, the enemy of mankind, the adversary of Christ personal and mystical, who is filled with envy, wrath, and malice, against Christ and his people; him, by the, means of the Gospel and the ministry of it, God has "caused to cease"^{f141}, as the word may be rendered; not as to his being, but as to his power and authority, in the Gentile world; out of which, to his great mortification, he was cast, by the mouth and ministry of babes and sucklings. These words are applied by Christ to the children in the temple, crying Hosanna to the son of David, out of whose mouths God perfected the praise of the Messiah; and by which, and Christ's defence of them, the Scribes and Pharisees, the mortal enemies of Christ, and who wanted to revenge themselves on him, were silenced and stilled, (~~4215~~Matthew 21:15,16).

Ver. 3. *When I consider thy heavens*, etc.] Where God dwells, and which he has made; the airy and starry heavens, which are to be seen with the bodily eye; and the heaven of heavens, which is to be beheld and considered by faith:

the work of thy fingers; being curiously wrought by his power, and garnished by his Spirit: for the finger of God is the Spirit of God; (see ~~4128~~Matthew 12:28); compared with (~~4212~~Luke 11:20);

the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, or "prepared"^{f142}, for various uses to the earth, and the inhabitants of it. The sun is not mentioned, because it cannot be looked upon, as the moon and the stars may, nor be seen when they are. And it is generally thought that David composed this psalm in the night, When these celestial bodies were in view; and, it may be, while he was keeping his father's sheep, since, in the enumeration of the creatures subject to man, sheep are mentioned first, as being in view, (~~4007~~Psalm 8:7). The heavenly bodies are very glorious creatures, and are worthy of the consideration and contemplation of man, and even of a saint; whereby he may be led to observe the wisdom, power, goodness, and greatness of God.

Ver. 4. *What is man, that thou art mindful of him?* etc.] That is, the psalmist, while he was considering the greatness and glory of the celestial bodies, thought this within himself, and so expressed it; which is to be understood, not of man in general, nor of Adam in a state of innocence; he

could not be called “Enosh”, the word here used, which signifies a frail, weak, sickly mortal man; nor could he with any propriety be said to be the son of man, as in the following clause: nor of fallen man, or of Adam’s posterity, descending from him by ordinary generation; for all things are not put in subjection to them, as is hereafter said of man: but this is to be understood of the man Christ Jesus, as it is interpreted in (⁸¹¹⁶ Hebrews 2:6-9); or of that individual of human nature which Christ assumed. The name of Enosh well agrees with him, who was a man of no note and esteem among men, a worm and no man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs, encompassed with infirmities, and was subject to death, and did die. Now it was a marvellous thing that God should be mindful of that individual of human nature; that he should prepare it in his council and covenant; that among the vast numbers of individuals which it came up in his infinite mind to create, he should choose this, to exalt it, and appoint it to union with his own Son, and take that delight in it he did; that when it was formed by his Spirit, he should anoint it with the oil of gladness above his fellows; that he should take such providential care of it, and so often and so strongly express his affection for it; that he should regard it, and support it under sufferings; and when in the grave, did not leave it, nor suffer it to see corruption; but raised it from the dead, and gave it glory, and exalted it at his own right hand;

and the son of man, that thou visitest him? The name of “the son of man” is the name of the Messiah, in (¹⁸⁰⁷ Psalm 80:17 ²⁷¹³ Daniel 7:13); and is often given to Christ, and used by him of himself in the New Testament. And this visiting of him is not to be understood in a way of wrath, though he was so visited by God, when he bore the chastisements of his people; but in a way of favour, by bestowing upon him without measure the gifts and graces of his Spirit; by affording him his gracious presence, and tilling him with spiritual peace and joy.

Ver. 5. *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,* etc.] Than Elohim, “than God”, as this word usually signifies: and could it be interpreted of man, as made by God, it might be thought to refer to the creation of him in the image and likeness of God; but as it must be understood of the human nature of Christ, it may regard the wonderful union of it to the Son of God, on account of which it is called by the same name, (⁴¹³⁵ Luke 1:35); and so made but a little lower than God, being next unto him, and in so near an union with a divine Person; and which union is hypostatical or personal, the human nature being taken into a personal

union with the Son of God: and so these words give an instance of God's marvellous regard to it; and contain a reason, proving that he has been mindful of it, and visited it. Though rather this clause refers to the humiliation of Christ in his human nature, as it is interpreted in (^{<3000>}Hebrews 2:9); and so it removes an objection, as it is connected with the following clause, which might be made against what had been observed in (^{<3004>}Psalm 8:4), on account of the low estate of Christ's human nature, when here on the earth; and the sense is, that God has been mindful of it, and visited it, notwithstanding its state of humiliation for a little while, seeing he has crowned it with glory and honour, etc. Christ was made low as to nature, place, estate, reputation, and life; he who was the most high God, in the form of God, and equal to him in the divine nature, was made frail mortal flesh, and was in the form of a servant in the human nature. He who dwelt on high, and lay in the bosom of his Father, descended into the lower parts of the earth, was formed in the womb of a virgin, and when born was laid in a manger, and dwelt and conversed with sinful mortal men upon earth: he who was Lord of all, whose is the earth, and the fulness of it, had not where to lay his head: he whose glory was the glory of the only begotten of the Father, became a worm and no man in the esteem of men, was despised and rejected of men, and was of no reputation: and he who was the Lord of life and glory was crucified and killed; becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Such is the nature of Christ's humiliation, expressed by being "made low"; the degree of it is, "lower than Elohim", than God: he was equal to him in the divine nature, but inferior to him in the human nature, (^{<4148>}John 14:28). As Mediator he was the servant of God, and the servant is not greater than his master; nor as such so great: and he was in his low estate in such a condition as to need the help and assistance of God, which he had in the day of salvation: and especially he was lower when he, was deserted by him, (^{<4246>}Matthew 27:46). Agreeably to which, some render the words, as they will bear to be rendered, "thou didst make him want God", or "didst deprive", or "bereave him of God"^{f143}; that is, of the gracious presence of God: and so Christ was made lower than God in nature, office, and condition. Sometimes the word "Elohim" is used for civil magistrates, as in (^{<4306>}Psalm 82:6); because they are in God's stead, and represent him; and, on account of their majesty, authority, and power, bear some resemblance to him. Now Christ was made lower than they, inasmuch as he not only taught obedience to them, but obeyed them himself, was a servant of rulers, paid tribute to them, and suffered himself to be examined, tried,

judged, and condemned by them; but since the word is rendered “angels” by the Chaldee paraphrase, the Septuagint interpreters, the Jewish commentators, Aben Ezra, Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, and in the Arabic, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions, and above all by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, it is best to interpret it of them: and Christ was made lower than they by assuming human nature, which is inferior to theirs, especially in the corporeal part of it; and more so, inasmuch as it was attended with infirmities, and subject to sorrows and griefs; and as it was sometimes reduced to great extremes, and to want the comforts of life; and sometimes was in such distress as to need the assistance and ministration of angels, which it had, (^{<4041>}Matthew 4:11 ^{<4228>}Luke 22:43); and particularly it was lower than they when deserted by God, whose face they always behold. To which may be added, that Christ was made under, a law given by the disposition of angels, ordained by them, and is called “the word” spoken by them; some parts of which they are not subject to; but the particular instance the apostle observes is suffering of death, (^{<3819>}Hebrews 2:9); which angels are not liable to, they die not. The duration of this low estate was “a little while”; for so the Hebrew word **j [m** may be rendered, as it is in (^{<4970>}Psalm 37:10), and the Greek **βραχυ τι**, used by the Septuagint, and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, as it is in (^{<4153>}Acts 5:34); which refers either to the time of suffering death, and lying under the power of that and the grave, which was but a little time; or at most to the days of his flesh, reaching from his incarnation to his resurrection; which was a course but of a few years, and may very well be expressed in this manner. And to this low estate was Christ brought by Jehovah the Father, who is the person spoken of throughout the psalm; he preordained him to it, prepared a body for him, sent him in the fulness of time, made of a woman, made under the law, and had a very great hand in his sufferings and death: though all was with Christ’s full consent, and with his free good will;

and hast crowned him with glory and honour; by raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand, committing all judgment to him; and requiring all creatures, angels and men, to give worship and adoration to him. And this being in consequence of his sufferings, after he had run the race, and endured a fight of afflictions; and because of the greatness of his glory and honour, with which he was as it were on all sides surrounded, he is said to be “crowned” with it; who a little before was

crowned with thorns, and encompassed with the terrors of death and hell. This respects his mediatorial glory.

Ver. 6. *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands,* etc.] All power in heaven and in earth being given to him: when he was raised from the dead, and when he ascended on high, and was set down at the right hand of God, he was made or declared Lord and Christ; Lord of the hosts of heaven, of all the angels there, King of saints, King of kings, and Lord of lords. All things in heaven and earth, which God has made, are put into his hands, to subserve his cause and glory, and for the good of his people; for he is head over all things to the church. The Ethiopic version reads, “all the works of thy hands”; among whom are angels. This is a greater dominion than was given to the first man, Adam, (^{<0025>}Genesis 1:25);

thou hast put all [things] under his feet; or put them in subjection to him, as the phrase signifies, and as it is interpreted, (^{<3018>}Hebrews 2:8). Good angels are subject to him, as appears by their ministration to him, their dependence on him, and adoration of him, (^{<0102>}1 Peter 3:22); devils are subject to him, whether they will or not; and so are wicked men, whose power and wrath he is able to restrain, and does; and the church is subject to Christ, as her head; and so all good men, willingly and heartily, and from a principle of love, obey his commands: yea, all creatures in the earth, air, and sea, are in subjection to him; an enumeration of which is given in the following verses.

Ver. 7. *All sheep and oxen,* etc.] The tame creatures, which are useful for food and clothing:

yea, and the beasts of the field; the wild beasts, which he can make use of to destroy and devour his enemies, and whom he can restrain from harming his own people, (^{<2153>}Jeremiah 15:8 ^{<2762>}Daniel 6:22 ^{<423>}Acts 28:3-5).

Ver. 8. *The fowl of the air,* etc.] These he rained about the tents of the Israelites for their relief, (^{<3987>}Psalm 78:27), and can command them to feed his people, as the ravens did Elijah, (^{<1174>}1 Kings 17:4,6); or to destroy his enemies, (^{<2153>}Jeremiah 15:3); (see ^{<5900>}Psalm 50:10,11);

and the fish of the sea: instances of Christ’s power over them, and of their being at his command, and for his service, may be seen in (^{<0177>}Matthew 17:27 ^{<0175>}Luke 5:5,6 ^{<5203>}John 21:3,6);

[and whatsoever] passeth through the paths of the seas: some ^{f144} understand this of ships, made by the wisdom and art of men, in which they pass through the paths of the sea, and fish in the midst of it. The Targum paraphrases it, “and leviathan, which passes through the paths of the sea”. Compare with this (^{2270b}Isaiah 27:1). Some interpret all these things in a figurative and allegorical way; and some of the ancients by “sheep” understood believers among the Gentiles; by “oxen”, the Jews; by “the beasts of the field”, idolaters and profane persons; “by the fowls of the air”, angels; and by “the fish of the sea”, devils: but these are much better explained by Cocceius, who, by “sheep”, understands common members of the churches; by “oxen”, those that labour in the word and doctrine; by “the beasts of the field”, aliens from the city and kingdom of God; men fierce and cruel, (^{2310b}Isaiah 11:6-8 65:25); by “the fowl of the air”, such as are tilted up with pride and vanity; and by “the fish of the sea”, such as are immersed in worldly pleasures. But it is best to interpret the whole literally; from whence may be observed, that what was lost by the first Adam is restored by the second; and that believers have a free use of all the creatures through Christ: and not only the things here mentioned are subject to him, but everything else; there is nothing left that is not put under him, only he is excepted that put all things under him, (³⁰¹⁸Hebrews 2:8 ⁴¹⁵⁷1 Corinthians 15:27).

Ver. 9. *O Lord our Lord, how excellent [is] thy name in all the earth!* The psalm ends with the same words with which it begins; which shows that the sense of this, with which the psalmist was affected, continued with him, and doubtless increased, after such a confirmation of it, by the instances he was led to take notice of. (See Gill on “³⁹⁰¹Psalm 8:1”).