

# BaptistWay: God's Majestic Greatness

February 22, 2013

- *The BaptistWay Bible Study for March 10 focuses on Psalm 8.*
- [Download a powerpoint resource for this lesson here.](#)

Psalm 8, a hymn of praise to God as Creator, begins and ends with the same celebration: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth?" (vv. 1, 9). The psalm celebrates the testimony creation gives to the greatness of God, focusing first on the way the heavens declare God's glory (v. 1) and then moving for the remainder of the psalm to the manner in which humanity displays the majesty of the Creator.

Verse 2 seems to interrupt the normal flow of the psalm, since verse 3 returns to the idea of considering the heavens introduced at the end of verse 1. However, the second verse does fit within the general theme of the psalm, providing an example of how humans glorify God. The verse mentions some people who make themselves the enemies of God, presumably challenging the psalmist's claim that God is great.

## **Weakness gives powerful testimony**

Verse 2 suggests the best response to these foes might be simply to show them the infants in a nursery. To hear one of these little creatures cry out is to find in their baby jabbering a testimony to God's goodness, who continues to create wonderful beings. Infants, though they represent humanity at its weakest, give powerful testimony to the graciousness of the Almighty, who continues to create life that is innocent and good. The psalm

testifies that babies, along with the heavens, are declaring the glory of God and silencing the cynical critics of the Lord.

Verses 3-4 contain a musing question for the psalmist, who has been stargazing and pondering the vastness of the cosmos. The mere size of the heavens seems to make the psalmist feel small and wonder about what significance any human being could have in the grand scheme of things: "What is a human being that you are mindful of him?" The musing might remind us of the common human experience of sometimes feeling insignificant. Perhaps all of us struggle now and again with a sense of inferiority, asking, "What am I worth?" or "Am I good for anything?" The psalmist emphatically answers his own question about the worth of people with this: "You have made humans a little lower than *elohim*, and crowned them with glory and honor!" (v. 5).

### **A translational challenge**

The Hebrew word transliterated here as *elohim* presents a translational challenge. In the vast number of occurrences of this word in the Hebrew Bible, it means "God." Such an approach would mean verse 5 declares the Lord has made humans "a little lower than God" or "divine." Such a claim is staggering. That probably is the reason that the Septuagint, an ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, chose to render the word not as "God" but with a Greek word that means "angels." As a result, some English translations also have "angels" in verse 5. While it is possible *elohim* might be used to refer to angels, that is a rare meaning and seemingly not what this psalm intends. Rather, verse 5 appears to claim God indeed has made humans "a little lower than divine," likely referring to their creation in the image of God. Perhaps the point is that people, more than any other earthly creature, have the capacity to reflect God's glory. The Creator has indeed crowned them with glory and honor.

As if that were not enough, verses 6-8 celebrate that God also has made

humans to be the Lord's representative rulers over the rest of creation, putting all animals under their care. The language specifically echoes the creation account of Genesis 1. This dominion implies people have a remarkable level of accountability to God with regard to the care of creation, making sure they preserve its goodness.

## **Majesty of God**

Remarkably, after this exalted description of the value of humans as creatures and rulers of the earth, the psalm does not end with "Humans, O humans, how majestic is your name in the earth." Instead, the high status of humans in creation simply testifies to the glorious greatness and love of the One who has made them, inspiring the psalm to conclude with a celebration of the majesty of God and God alone.

Psalm 8 is quoted several times in the New Testament. Some texts reconfigure the psalm's language of "you have placed all things under his feet" to apply uniquely to Jesus, who, as the new Adam, has final dominion over all creation (1Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22). Another allusion to the psalm appears in Matthew 21:16, which depicts Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and cleansing the temple. On that occasion, Jesus also healed the sick and received cheers from children who cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

The Jewish leaders who watched grew furious at his audacity and popularity, demanding he stop the adulation. Jesus' response was a reapplication of the language of Psalm 8:2. He asked, "Have you never heard, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" The quotation amounts to a double claim: that Jesus is on a par with God, as this praise of him in the temple is equivalent to the praise of God in Psalm 2:2, and that the Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus clearly are in the same category as the vengeful enemies of God mentioned in the psalm.

