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1

Psalms 1–50: Songs of Devotion

PSALM 1

It is appropriate that an introduction such as Psalm 1 should begin this collection of songs and poems. Two ways of life are presented immediately. First there is the way of the righteous, the blessed, the lawkeeper, the avoider of sins. On the other hand, there is the wicked, the chaff-like man, who deserves no reward with the blessed. After all is said and done, are there not but two ways of life? We either fear and love God or we do not. The latter is one of the simplest definitions of sin.

The psalm is interesting in its structure as well as universal in its application. It has the typical parallelism of phrasing found throughout the poetical books of the Old Testament. The first verse is an example of this. Three things the blessed man does not do: he does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly; he does not stand in the way of sinners; he does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

More interesting, however, is the chiastic structure of the poem. *Chiastic* means that the first and last themes or ideas reflect each other and the middle ideas reflect each other—A B B A. In

verses 1–2, there is the blessed man deciding for righteousness and against wickedness. At the end of the poem, in verses 5–6, the blessed Lord "decides" for the righteous man and against the wicked. In the middle of the psalm two pictures are drawn by the literary artist. Verse 3 is a picture of the righteous man as a green, fruitful tree in a fertile place. Verse 4 is a picture of a wicked man who is like useless chaff, fit only to be blown away by the wind.

Looking at the psalm in more detail, one sees what the blessed and wicked ways are. The man who does not follow bad advice, stand with sinners, or spend all his time criticizing is blessed. The verbs in verse 1 present a progression: walking, standing, sitting. But the three kinds of bad people are not progressively worse. Scorners are not worse than sinners.

What does walking in the counsel of the ungodly mean? It means simply following the advice of people who do not consider God. They do not mean to be anti-godly or atheistic, but they do not fear and love God. Hence when they give advice, God's claims and commands are of little moment. This verse is especially good for young people who are facing the major decisions of life: What and where shall I study? Whom shall I marry? What shall be my career? Shall I serve God?

Taking the advice of the ungodly leads to standing where sinners stand. We might put it in these terms: Ungodly advice leads to taking a sinner's stand on spiritual and moral issues.

The last term, *scorn,* is not too common in modern English but finds its meaning in our word *mockery.* People in the "scorner's seat" criticize many things but, in particular, God's people, God's Book, and God's way. They often mock God's Son and even the Father Himself.

But the Bible does not describe good merely in negative terms, and there follows here a description of what the blessed man is

like. He thinks about God and His law, the Bible. This does not mean that he is a professional Bible scholar but, rather, that throughout the day and the waking hours of the night every happening of life prompts a reflection on something in the Bible.

Verses 3–4 present two pictures: verse 3 of the blessed man and verse 4 of the ungodly man. The former is like a green and productive tree because it is planted by a river (cf. Jer. 17:8). The ungodly is pictured as chaff, the refuse of the wheat-threshing operation. Bible students may be permitted to see some limited types here. The water is a source of life as Christ is our life. The unwithering leaf is the unblemished and untarnished testimony of the obedient Christian. The fruit (cf. Gal. 5:22f.) in season is the regular and abundant service which we ought to render to our Lord. In the second picture, the useless, inedible chaff is fit only for destruction. This corresponds to the eternal destiny of the wicked, who are utterly lost.

The *therefore* of verse 5 introduces the conclusion. Because the wicked are like chaff, they shall not stand at the judgment—they shall not be in the congregation of the righteous. When God executes His justice they shall not be able to withstand it. In verse 1, the blessed man chose not to stand or sit with sinners; now God justly forbids the sinner to stand or sit with His chosen. He knows and loves the righteous way of the righteous man, but the ungodly way of the ungodly man leads to peril and punishment.

PSALM 2

The second psalm is well-known for at least two reasons. It is the first Messianic psalm (verse 2 has in it the word *anointed,* which is *Messiah* in Hebrew and *Christ* in Greek). When Paul preached to the Jews of Antioch in Pisida, he cited the seventh verse (Acts 13:33). This is the only numbered reference to any Old

Testament passage in the New Testament. Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 contain the same quotation. Revelation 19 has several allusions to phrases in this psalm. Psalm 2:2 may be the background of Revelation 19:19 and Psalm 2:9–10 of Revelation 19:15.

Psalm 2 has far-reaching implications and dramatic scenes. It is also interesting in its structure. The twelve verses may easily be divided into four stanzas of three verses each. In the first three verses the vicious but vain actions of the enemies of God are presented in the form of a rhetorical question. In verses 4–6 attention is focused on the almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth and His fearful reaction to hostile plots. Verses 7–9 are largely a quotation within a quotation. The Son relates His Father's instructions to Him. Finally, the last three verses are exhortations to the rulers to be obeisant and obedient to the Son. Thus we have:

The actions of earthly rulers (vv. 1–3)
The actions of God the Father (vv. 4–6)
The commands to the Son (vv. 7–9)
The commands to earthly rulers (vv. 10–12)

Note the parallelism, A A B B, and the chiasmus, A B B A. (See commentary on Psalm 1 for an explanation of these terms.)

The opening verses, which describe the actions of ungodly men, do so both in general and specific terms and with progressively more detail. The psalmist indicts the nations and the people in the first verse and the leaders of the people in the second verse. Their deeds are described in the first verse as generally mad and futile, but are narrowed down in the second verse to a specific plot to overthrow God and His Christ. The third verse gives the details of this evil plot. The same Hebrew word lies behind the "meditate" of Psalm 1:2 as the word "rage" in Psalm 2:1. Whereas

the godly man uses his mental energies delighting in God's Word, the ungodly leaders use theirs to plot against God's rule.

This description of the unfortunate and uninformed state of the unregenerate mind is not unique to 1000 BC when David lived. The same thought patterns prevail more or less openly today. The world is at enmity with God, and rulers and ruled alike seek to escape the demands of God on their lives. They seek to outwit the Creator and to undo the mission of His dear Son.

The picture of God in the fourth verse is an unusual one. He laughs and derides. The laugh seems to be the kind of chuckle a champion gives when his opponent's defeat is imminent. The derision is probably mixed with the wrath and displeasure described in the following verse. He laughs at the futility of human actions, but He is angry at the whole idea of man trying to overthrow God. Rather than surrender His dignity, He commissions His king to execute wrath.

Because of the sixth verse, many liberal commentators see David and David only in this psalm. They call it a royal psalm and say it was probably composed for the enthronement of the monarch. The kingship of Israel was a divinely appointed office. The king was "set" or installed because of God's choice and was there to rule on God's behalf.

Such a limited application, however, is incompatible with the remainder of the psalm. Unless the accomplishments and promises of the Son are great exaggerations, they cannot apply to David, but only to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, and because the inspired authors of the New Testament so understood it, this psalm speaks of the commission and mission of Jesus the Messiah.

It helps to understand the third section of the psalm by supplying quotation marks in verses 7–9. The whole section is spoken by

the Son, but He quotes His Father beginning with the words, "Thou art my Son." There is some question as to whether verse 7 should read "the decree of the LORD" or "the decree: the LORD said."

The words of the decree itself are all-important. God says to the Messiah, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Besides being an argument for at least two persons of the Trinity being mentioned in the Old Testament, it is also a statement of the relationship between these two persons. Paul used this verse in Acts 13:33 to support the resurrection of Christ. The Father offers the Son, for the asking, the world for an inheritance. The rebellious nations of verse 1 become the property of the Son. This truth is missionary as well as Messianic. Any passage which speaks of the ends of the earth in the plans of God is missionary. Here, however, more of the negative, judicial aspect of the Son's task is in view. Since the nations are rebels, He will smash them as one would smash a clay pot with an iron rod. The only way to avoid this wrathful punishment is to obey the commands of the last quarter of the psalm.

Verses 10–12 contain five commands to leaders of the nations: be wise, be instructed, serve the Lord, rejoice, and kiss the Son. A colloquial translation might render the first two: "Wise up; get smart." With such enlightened attitudes and divinely illumined spirits they then could serve, rejoice, and kiss the Son.

Perhaps the typical Protestant church needs verse 11b underscored: "Rejoice with trembling." We sometimes forget that it is possible to put these two things side by side. Often when we rejoice we lose our sense of dignity, and when we fear God we forget to enjoy our positions of sonship.

The translators of the Revised Standard Version presumed additional letters in the Hebrew text in order to produce their

translation at this point: "Kiss his feet." The presence of the Aramaic word for son (*bar* rather than the Hebrew *ben)* perplexed them, but in recent years discoveries have shown that Aramaic is an older language than was thought. It is older than the writing of this psalm, and therefore it is not impossible that such a loan word could appear at this point, as the ancient inspired author sought for variety and color. Hence the older original reading, "Kiss the Son," is preferred. It means to do obeisance to Him. This is not the romantic kiss but the kiss on the feet, the hand, or the shoulder. His worshipers should reverence Him as vassals honored an ancient earthly sovereign. The word *little* may be a limitation of time or of quantity; that is, God's wrath may "soon" be kindled (NASB), or it may be kindled "but a little" (KJV). There are good reasons for either translation. The major concern ought to be that God be neither a little displeased with us nor soon be angered by us.

The last phrase describes the believer's place of blessedness. One arrives there by putting his trust in God. And so Psalm 2 ends with a promise, using the same line of thought with which Psalm 1 begins: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

PSALM 3

The third psalm is the first one with a title. Mystery surrounds the origin of psalm titles. In most instances the title pertains to the contents of the psalm. Psalm 51 is a good example. The contents of Psalm 3 could describe any of several tight circumstances which David experienced.

The word rendered "psalm" in this title appears fifty-seven times in other titles. In most of these instances the Hebrew word describing the kind of a psalm is merely transliterated: *Shiggaion* (Ps. 7), *Michtam* (Ps. 16), and *Maschil* (Ps. 78). There is no reason

not to believe that Psalm 3 describes David's sentiments toward his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15–18), as the inscription indicates.

Selah first occurs in this psalm, where it is found three times. Although many suggestions have been made as to the meaning of this little word, it remains quite uncertain. It is probably a musical notation having something to do with the tempo, volume, or accompaniment of the song, or with the participation or posture of the singer. All attempts to translate it have been unfortunate and ill-advised. For the sake of symmetry one would expect a *selah* after verse 6, but there is none.

Psalm 3 falls into the category of "trouble and trust" psalms, and is one of the shorter ones. David begins by crying out to God about his troubles, which come primarily in the form of enemies (vv. 1–2). Then follows a personal testimony of God's past favors and grace. Finally, as if to say, "Do it again, Lord," the psalmist prays for salvation for himself and blessing on his people.

The emphasis in the complaint section is on the great number of enemies (cf. 2 Sam. 17:1). Three times the Hebrew root for *many* occurs (translated "increased" in verse l). Not only are these multitudes the enemies of David, but they are enemies of his God as well. Their accusation betrays this as they falsely charge, "There is no help for him in God." The word for *help* is the same word as *salvation* elsewhere (v. 8). Certainly these enemies had in mind temporal, physical salvation, although David might have meant his spiritual salvation as well. A similar range of meaning inheres in the word translated *soul.* Sometimes it means simply "breath." At other times the life principle is meant.

The testimony section begins, in general terms, in verse 3. God, says David, is my shield (cf. Gen. 15:1), my glory, and the lifter up of my head. The verb *lift* may echo an earlier use of the term in verse 1. Although his enemies rose up, God raised him

yet higher. Verses 4–5 mention particular features of his deliverance. In the past he cried and God heard. In the past he slept soundly and God preserved him. Hence, with this new challenge, he testifies that he will not be afraid of myriads of hostile people all around him.

Some early Church Fathers saw the death and resurrection of Christ in verse 5, but most commentators see in these words simply a morning prayer.

The third section (vv. 7–8) contains a prayer for deliverance, but also includes statements of God's past accomplishments. Two verbs form the basis of the prayer: *arise* and *save.* Then, as if to remind God of His ability, the psalmist states how God had smashed the jaws and broken the teeth of former enemies. He thus likens his adversaries to disarmed animals, their weapons of destruction (jaws and teeth) now destroyed.

The last verse is somewhat like a benediction, but it is also a prayer. Salvation is God's. And since it is, the blessing is the people's. There is no salvation apart from God and He ever wants to give His people His blessing.

PSALM 4

Two additional technical terms are found in the title of Psalm 4. The *choirmaster* or *chief musician* occurs first and then the name of a musical instrument or a melody, *Neginoth,* follows. This, too, is a psalm by or about David, as the last two words of the title indicate.

It is difficult to know whom the author is addressing except in those verses where he clearly is petitioning God. Specifically, who are the "sons of men" in verse 2? Usually this term simply means "men" in the frailty of their human limitations (cf. Ps. 8:4, Gen. 6:2), including their propensity to sin. Were these merely

the enemies of David, or did the inspired penman have all men in mind? Apparently the psalm is addressed to all men, for, apart from taking the advice of verses 3 and 4, all men love vanity and seek lies (which is the meaning of the word *leasing*, v. 2, in the KJV).

The psalm begins and ends with addresses to God. In the middle section (vv. 2–6) are admonitions to men.

The first verse is something of an introduction. There are three imperative verbs in this one verse: *answer* (rendered "hear" in the KJV), *have mercy*, and *hear*. In a manner typical of many prayers in the Bible, David reminds God of past deliverances. Things were tight for God's servant, but the Lord had released him and loosed the tension.

The first words directed to David's human audience are words of rebuke and reprimand. The three phrases are clipped and abrupt. To make the meaning understandable to the non-Semitic mind, translators must add phrases such as those indicated by italics in the King James Version. The "sons of men" turn the psalmist's glory into shame, they love vanity, they seek lies. Perhaps that first sin is their mocking or insulting David's God and making light of his devotion. (For a discussion of *selah*, see commentary on Psalm 3.)

In the rough chiastic arrangement of this psalm, verse 6 corresponds to verse 2. Again, David complains of those who ask ridiculing questions about his faith. Many of them wonder if there is any good any more. Assuming that their words continue through the end of the verse, they also ask whether God would lift up His countenance on them.

The central portion, verses 3–5, contains words of instruction. Count the commands: know, stand in awe, sin not, commune, be still, sacrifice, and trust. In verse 3 David wishes that we might know that God sovereignly sets apart the godly for Himself. It is interesting that coupled with that truth is the one regarding our

ability to call on Him. So on the one hand God calls, or sets apart, the godly and on the other hand He hears those who call on Him. In the one instance God initiates the action, and in the other man does. The next four imperatives have to do with personal, private devotion. The first Hebrew word of verse 4 is rare and its translation here is uncertain. The Septuagint has "be angry." This is apparently the basis of Paul's use of the verse in Ephesians 4:26.

Perhaps if *selah* seems appropriate anywhere it is here, in view of the words "be still" which precede.

Verse 5 speaks of public worship: offer sacrifices. Then 5b has the final and yet most basic instruction: trust in the LORD (cf. Ps. 37:5 and Prov. 3:5–6). Sacrifices without trust are of no use. Works without faith are dead.

Having experienced God's salvation and continuing mercy and care, David concludes the psalm with two verses of praise. In terms understandable to farmers, he says that he is happier than at harvest. In contrast to this overt jubilation is his quiet confidence that lets him sleep soundly while God watches over his safety. *Peace* is a word loaded with meaning. One English word cannot do justice to *shalom.* Included in it are the ideas of economic and physical satisfaction, of health, and of peace with God and men. All this was possible in David's day and is also possible in ours because the Lord makes us dwell in safety.

PSALM 5

Like Psalm 3, Psalm 5 also may be a prayer or song for morning devotions, as verse 3 suggests. Like the other psalms in the beginning section of this book, it is a mixture of praise and prayer to God combined with complaints about enemies and about wicked men in general.

The title is similar to that of Psalm 4. Both have to do with

the chief musician. But instead of being played on some stringed instrument (*Neginoth*) this poem is for the *Nehiloth,* which may mean "flutes."

The psalm has no easily discernible outline. Verses 1–3 and 8 are petitions. Four through six speak of God and His hatred of sin. Verse 7 contrasts the righteous behavior of the psalmist with the description of evildoers in the preceding verses and in verses 9 and 10. Verses 11 and 12 are a kind of benediction, which both admonishes and intercedes for the believer and praises God.

Three parallel but unbalanced lines, plus one odd line, make up the first two verses. *Give ear, consider,* and *hear* are the primary verbs. *My words*, *my meditation*, and *my cry* are the objects. O LORD, *my King*, and *my God* are the three vocatives. The words "consider my meditation" (or literally "groaning") in verse 1 are richer if understood as prayer that God will interpret those unintelligible noises that come from deep thought. The psalmist prays that God will understand (Rom. 8:26f.).

Verse 3 indicates that the psalm may have been composed for morning worship (cf. Ps. 3:5). If not, it may simply show that the psalmist considered prayer important enough to put early in his daily schedule.

Unlike the preceding psalms, where some verses are directed to the readers, this psalm in its entirety is addressed to God. The psalmist's complaints are not to men but to God. He urges not men but God. He communes not with men but with God. Even the criticism of the wicked is put in the form of praise: "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (v. 5).

In verse 6a is the only instance, in this psalm, of the psalmist's speaking of God in the third person. There he mentions what God Himself already knows. It is another instance of the one praying

reminding God of His faithfulness. Later, in verse 10, he demands that God, who abhors unrighteousness, cast out the transgressors.

David asserts his own good intentions in verse 7. This is in contrast to the debauchery and deceit of the wicked described in the two preceding verses (5–6). In both Hebrew and English, verse 7 is a *chiasmus,* although translators have somewhat revised the structure. Literally it would read:

> But I,
>
> in the multitude of thy mercies, I will come to thy house
> I will worship at thy holy temple in thy fear.

Following this interjection of praise, David prays specifically for direction (v. 8). After that, he again launches into a diatribe against the wicked. Apparently David had been the object of much verbal abuse. Verse 9 contains his counter invective. Paul used elements of this verse in Romans 3:13 where he, too, describes the wickedness of men.

Then in verse 10, with strong passion, David as much as commands God to destroy his enemies, to let them fall, and to cast them out. Then from a different viewpoint, he focuses on the righteous and prays that they might have cause to rejoice, to shout, and to be joyful (v. 11).

Verse 12 concludes the psalm on a note of assurance, with complete faith that the Judge of all the earth will do right (cf. Gen. 18:25). From past experience, and simply because he believes in the God to whom he prays, the psalmist boldly says, "With favour wilt thou compass [the righteous] as with a shield" (cf. Ps. 3:3 KJV).

PSALM 6

In the title of Psalm 6 is another uncertain musical term. *Sheminith* is related to the word for *eight* and so may refer to the eight strings of a musical instrument, or to an eightnoted melody to which the psalm was sung. Perhaps it is an ancient reference to the octave.

Psalm 6 is a kind of personal lament. The classification "trouble and trust" aptly describes this psalm, as well as many others. Toward the end, however, there is a note of hope.

The psalmist begins with a recitation of his troubles. That prompts prayer for deliverance, which culminates in an affirmation of faith and confidence of victory. The more we focus on God and His greatness the more insignificant our troubles become. Many believers let their problems block their view of God. Psalms such as this should remind us that He is the God of the impossible and He summons us to cast our burdens on Him and to spread our concerns before Him.

The source of trouble in this psalm seems to be both from within and without. The first three verses sound like a confession of sin, while mention of adversaries appears in verse 7 and following. We are always our own worst enemy. Even Paul often did that which he did not want to do (Rom. 7:15). We certainly need God's help to overcome the old nature. It may be that the psalmist is equating his enemies' onslaughts with God's punishment of his sins. This raises the larger question as to whether God immediately punishes the believer for his sins. The believer must discern between punishment for wrongdoing through the chastening hand of a loving heavenly Father and the malicious attacks of Satan, the accuser of the brethren. This was Job's dilemma.

The actual content of the psalm raises some interesting ques-

tions. From the first three verses, one might wonder to what extent grief affects physical well-being. In verse 2 the psalmist is withered and troubled in his "bones." The word "vexed," or "troubled," appears again in verse 3 and describes his soul. "Soul" recurs in verse 4 as the focus of God's deliverance. *Bones* frequently indicates one's inmost being.

Verse 5 raises the question of the psalmist's view of the afterlife. The Hebrew word *Sheol* here is parallel to "death." Often it is rendered "grave" and occasionally "hell." The psalmist is not denying consciousness after death. Rather he is saying that those who praise and thank God are the living. He is not addressing himself to the question of a conscious afterlife; rather, he is pleading with God for length of this life.

Perhaps the *withering* (KJV, weak) of verse 2 is to be understood with the profuse and bitter weeping of verses 6 and 7. So much water has flowed from the eyes of the grieved that he is literally drying up. As an adjective, this form of the word occurs only once in the Bible.

The turning point of this psalm is in the middle of verse 8, the first half of which is an imperative. The second half is declarative. It is almost as if a certain assurance of answered prayer suddenly flooded the psalmist. Why should he groan and complain any longer? The Lord has heard the sound of his weeping; He has heard his supplication; He will receive his prayer. These statements are the essence of the "trust" mentioned in this psalm. How the Lord, who has heard, will act is recited in the last verse. His enemies shall be shamed and troubled. The very words in verse 3a which describe his soul's condition now describe his foes in verse 10a. Now they shall be "greatly troubled."

In the course of this psalm the writer moves closer to God and thus relatively further from his enemies. God and the psalmist's

adversaries are rather fixed entities in this drama. It is the psalmist whose position changes. When he is far from God, he is in jeopardy. But as he moves toward God, his enemy is disadvantaged, and the psalmist has his twofold problem solved. His fellowship with God is restored—the problem of the opening verses—and his vulnerability to his enemies is lessened. This pattern is the same for the Christian in his relationship to his Lord and to the enemies of the cross.

PSALM 7

Psalm 7 is called a *Shiggaion* of David. That technical Hebrew term occurs only twice in the Bible. Habakkuk 3:1 has the plural form, a verb meaning "to wander," which has the same root but does not explain anything about this psalm. It is best to offer no guesses.

Cush the Benjamite is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. He was probably a henchman of King Saul. This psalm probably comes out of the experiences narrated in 1 Samuel, when Saul relentlessly sought to destroy David.

Psalm 7 fits into the same category as the preceding one. It is, however, longer and more complicated. The mention of enemies appears again and again (vv. 1, 5, 6). Likewise, affirmations of trust in God occur throughout the psalm (vv. 1, 8, 9, 10, 11).

Verse 1 opens with a declaration of belief and trust. The Lord was David's God and in Him he took refuge. Then follows an imperative verb, a prayer, "Save me." Saul had shown himself ruthless before, and David feared he would be so again. He compared the king with a lion. From a poetic standpoint, notice *deliver* at the end of the first and second verses. In modern, non-poetic language we might say, "Save me while you can." These two verses are the essence of the psalm. The rest is elaboration on the two

themes presented here: "The Lord is my God" and "Save me from my enemies."

Verses 3–5 are something of a self-imprecation. The writer calls curses on himself if he is not a man of integrity. The word *if,* which occurs three times, invites examination from God. The implication—rather, the assertion is that he has no evil; he has not done wrong. Having vindicated and exonerated himself and concluded with a *selah,* he continues to pray. Verses 6–9 are filled with appeals that God should act on his behalf: *arise, lift up, awake, judge*, and so forth. Even as the psalmist pleads his own righteousness in the verses above, so here he founds his case on God's justice. Note the number of occurrences in verse 8–11 of such terms as *judgment, judge, righteousness, integrity,* and *upright.*

The subjects of the verbs in verse 12 appear ambiguous, but most agree on an indefinite subject for the first verb. God is the subject of the ensuing verbs. The import is that, if the wicked man will not repent, God will whet His sword and punish him. But in verse 14 the wicked man is again the subject. Words usually used to describe childbearing appear here to describe the production of evil. Everything goes wrong for the wicked. He falls into the pit he dug to trap others, and all his evil plans backfire.

As if David saw victory already accomplished, he closes the psalm on a note of thanksgiving and praise. Once more he mentions the justice of God—the basis on which the evil are punished and the righteous are acquitted, justified, and avenged.

PSALM 8

Psalm 8 is one of the better-known psalms. The almost identical opening and closing verses often have been put to music. The fourth verse is well-known because the author of Hebrews quotes it and applies it to Jesus Christ.

The meaning of the word *Gittith* in the title of the psalm is unknown. Neither context nor related words reveals what it means. Psalms 81 and 84 use the word and they are works of jubilant praise. The two most common suggestions are that it is a tune or a musical instrument.

The psalm falls easily into the following chiastic outline:

A God's excellent name (v. 1)
  B God's rule (vv. 2–3)
    C Man's meanness (v. 4)
    C′ Man's greatness (v. 5)
  B′ Man's rule (vv. 6–8)
A′ God's excellent name (v. 9)

The first half of the first verse is identical to the entire last verse and so these two elements are coupled in the outline. The two longer sections marked "B" describe God's rule and man's rule, respectively. The two middle verses (4, 5) are direct contrasts. First there is man's low view of himself as compared to God and then God's view of man.

The first verse is more extensive than the last. It states that God's name is excellent and worthy to be adored over all the earth, but it also states that His glory is set in the heavens. The latter part of verse 1 may belong with the next section of the outline.

From the suckling baby described in verse 2 on up to the highest heavens, God is Lord of all. Verse 2 is often recalled when a child says something very profound. Sometimes in their naivete children pronounce great truths which adults know but forget. One fall evening the neighbor children were playing beside our house. As it grew dark one of them said they should go home, but another responded: "Why should we be afraid of the dark? God's

here." This is the meaning of Psalm 8:2. The expression *babes and sucklings* may indicate children old enough to talk. Hebrew mothers often nursed their babies for four or five years.

The purpose of using such feeble instruments to announce God's glory is to offend the adversary. How many unbelievers have been rebuked by the innocently offered remark of a child schooled in the basics of God-fearing living! When the children sang "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday, Jesus reminded the people of this verse (Matt. 21:16).

From the earthbound sphere of children, verse 3 lifts our attention to the heavens. They are the work of God's fingers. He has ordained the various heavenly bodies. The word "when" connects this verse very closely with the next.

Having focused the reader's attention on the heavens, the psalmist then wonders what dealings God would ever have with man. Why should a mortal be thought of or visited by Deity? The fifth verse answers that question immediately. It is because man is really just a little lower than God. The Hebrew word usually means "God," sometimes it means "gods," and, in a few instances, "angels." The point is that man is not just a little higher than the animals but a little lower than heaven.

Hebrews 2:6–8 quotes this passage and applies it to Christ. That New Testament passage shows that Christ is superior to angels. But because it seems to say much the opposite (the Greek word in Hebrews is "angels" and not "God"), some take the word "little" to refer to time. According to that interpretation, He was for a little while lower than the angels. This is supported by the commentary that follows in Hebrews 2:9. Psalm 8 doubtlessly is speaking of all men in general, but the writer of Hebrews, by divine inspiration, refers specifically and specially to Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God.