

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
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Psalm 138 — Strengthened, Revived, and Not Forsaken

1.0 Introducing Psalm 138

- Note the contrast between this psalm and the previous: in Babylonian exile the Israelites could not sing songs of praise (Ps 137:2–4), but in the sanctuary the songs of praise and thanksgiving come easily (Ps 138).
- Psalm 138 is the first of the Psalter's last eight psalms by David (Pss 138–145).
- These eight psalms by David are a kind of commentary on the Davidic Covenant revealed in 2 Samuel 7:8–16.

2.0 Reading Psalm 138 (NAU)

138:1 *A Psalm* of David.

I will give You thanks with all my heart;
I will sing praises to You before the gods.

138:2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple
And give thanks to Your name **for Your lovingkindness and Your truth;**
For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

138:3 On the day I called, You answered me;
You made me bold with strength in my soul.

138:4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD,
When they have heard the words of Your mouth.

138:5 And they will sing of the ways of the LORD,
For great is the glory of the LORD.

138:6 For though the LORD is exalted,
Yet He regards the lowly,
But the haughty He knows from afar.

138:7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
You will revive me;

You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies,
And Your right hand will save me.

138:8 The LORD will accomplish what concerns me;
Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

For the choir director.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 138

3.1 Outline

- I. The Psalm's Composer Sings of God's Grace: Adoration (vv. 1–3)
- II. The Planet's Kings Sing of God's Greatness: Anticipation (vv. 4–6)
- III. The Psalm's Composer Speaks of God's Goodness: Assurance (vv. 7–8)

3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “of David”
 - The vocabulary and phraseology is like that which David employed elsewhere. The following is but a partial list:
 - ✓ Compare verse 1 (“with all my heart”) with 9:1 and 86:12.
 - ✓ Compare verse 2 (“bow down toward Your holy temple”) with 5:7 and 11:4.
 - ✓ Compare verse 2 with (“Your lovingkindness and Your truth”) 25:10; 36:5; 40:10, 11; 57:3, 10; 61:7; 69:13; 86:15.
 - ✓ Compare verse 2 (“magnified . . . Your name”) with 2 Samuel 7:26.
 - ✓ Compare verse 3 (“called . . . answered”) with 4:1; 17:6; 86:7.
 - ✓ Compare verse 4 (“kings of the earth”) with 2:2, 10.
 - ✓ Compare verse 7 (“though I walk”) with 23:4.
 - ✓ Compare verse 8 (“accomplish what concerns me”) with 57:2.
 - “Of course the critics have tried to rend the authorship from David on account of the mention of the temple, . . . Many modern critics are to the word of God what blow-flies are to the food of men: they cannot do any good, and unless relentlessly driven away they do great harm.”
— C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:243.
- **v. 1** “with all my heart”
 - David purposefully devotes himself to a conscious and determined praise and thanksgiving.
 - Praise and thanksgiving are a matter of choice.
 - There is a chiasm in this first verse. Note where the focus resides:

A	I will give You thanks	B	with all my heart;
		B'	before the gods.
A'	I will sing praises to You		
- **v. 1** “before the gods”
 - Four views concerning the identification of “gods” here:

- ✓ “God”—in the sense of “before the ark of God” = in the sanctuary.
- ✓ Angels—as in Psalm 29:1.
- ✓ Kings and judges—as in Psalm 82:6 (cp. John 10:35).
- ✓ False gods—in other words, before even the unbelievers and their idols.
Reasons this is the best interpretation: (1) The interlinking chiasms of verses 1–2 parallel “gods” with “Your holy temple.” (2) The psalmist avoids including the name of Yahweh in the same verse with the reference to the pagan deities (v. 1). (3) The psalmist contrasts the pagan gods with Yahweh. (4) Since verse 4 refers specifically to kings, a reference to them as “gods” here seems out of place and unnecessary. (5) See Psalms 95:3; 96:5.

- **v. 2 “I will bow down”**

- A second chiasm links with the first one. Note where the focus shifts:



A before the gods.

B	I will sing praises to You
B'	I will bow down

A' toward Your holy temple

- **v. 2 “toward Your holy temple”**

- See 1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3—the Tabernacle in Shiloh.
 - Compare 1 Kings 8:29—Solomon’s Temple.

- **v. 2 “You have magnified Your word”**

- In other words, God surpasses all previous revelation in the fulfillment of His promises. — Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 244.
 - “He has magnified it above all his name in the fulfillment of it: God’s faithfulness being so dear to him, he has exalted his faithfulness above all his other perfections.” — Joseph C. Philpot as cited in Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3/2:251.
 - The best meaning appears to be along the line expressed by the following interpretive paraphrase: “because You have magnified Your word above (*and beyond anything we would have expected from*) Your name (*/known reputation*).” In other words, God had exceeded David’s expectations based upon his (obviously limited) knowledge and experience of God and His deeds (cf. Eph 3:20). It is as though David was saying, “God, You really outdid Yourself this time! What You have done in fulfilling Your promise by Your Word is far beyond what I had come to know about Your loyal love and faithfulness.”

- **vv. 4–5 — Compare vv. 1–2:**

v. 1 – I will give You thanks	v. 4 – All the kings . . . will give thanks
v. 2 – to Your name	v. 4 – to You, O LORD
v. 2 – Your word	v. 4 – the words of Your mouth
v. 2 – For You have magnified	v. 5 – For great is the glory

- **v. 4** “All the kings of the earth”
 - “David, the king, cared for kings’ souls, and it will be wise for each man to look first after those who are of his own order.” — Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3/2:245.
 - Messiah will be King of kings and His message will be received by some kings, who will worship Him. Compare Psalms 2:10; 72:10–11; 89:27; 119:46; 148:11; Isaiah 49:7; 52:15; 60:3.
- **v. 5** “they will sing”
 - “There will come a time when the praise of Jahve, which according to cxxxvii. 3 was obliged to be dumb in the presence of the heathen, will, according to cxxxviii. 5, be sung by the kings of the heathen themselves.” — Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans. by Francis Bolton, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, F. Delitzsch and C. F. Keil (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1968), 3:338.
- **v. 6** “Yet He regards the lowly”
 - “Because you are on a mountain, do you think that you are near God and that you are heard quickly, as if shouting from nearby? He dwells on high, but ‘he looks on the lowly.’ ‘The Lord is near.’ To whom? Perhaps to the high? ‘To those who are contrite of heart.’ It is a wondrous thing: he both lives on high and draws near to the lowly.” — Augustine, “Tractates on the Gospel of John,” 15.25.1, cited in Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, ed., *Psalms 51–150*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 382.
- **v. 7** “Though I walk in the midst of trouble”
 - God is with His people even in the midst of their trials.
 - Compare Psalm 23:4.
- **v. 8** “Do not forsake the works of Your hands”
 - Literally, “Do not drop the works of Your hands.”
 - Compare Philippians 1:6 and Romans 8:28–30.

4.0 Singing Psalm 138

“With Grateful Heart My Thanks I Bring”

(Tune: “The Solid Rock”)



1 With grateful heart my thanks I bring,
Before the great Thy praise I sing;
I worship in Thy holy place
And praise Thee for Thy truth and grace;
For truth and grace together shine
In Thy most holy Word divine,
In Thy most holy Word divine.

2 I cried to Thee and Thou didst save,
Thy Word of grace new courage gave;
The kings of earth shall thank Thee, Lord,
For they have heard Thy wondrous Word;
Yea, they shall come with songs of praise,
For great and glorious are Thy ways,
For great and glorious are Thy ways.

3 O Lord, enthroned in glory bright,
Thou reignest in the heavenly height;
The proud in vain Thy favor seek,
But Thou hast mercy for the meek;
Through trouble though my pathway be,
Thou wilt retrieve and strengthen me,
Thou wilt retrieve and strengthen me.

4 Thou wilt stretch forth Thy mighty arm
To save me when my foes alarm;
The work Thou hast for me begun
Shall by Thy grace be fully done;
Forever mercy dwells with Thee;
O Lord, my Maker, think on me,
O Lord, my Maker, think on me.

— Words: *The Psalter* (1912)

5.0 Praying Psalm 138

- With all my heart, Lord, I thank You. [v. 1]
- Thank You, Father, for the strength you gave me when I asked. [v. 3]
- May kings hear Your Word and sing Your praise! [vv. 4–5]
- I praise You, Lord, for caring for the lowly. [v. 6]
- Father, lead me and preserve me though my trials and troubles. [v. 7]
- Oh God, finish Your work in me and through me. [v. 8]



6.0 Applying Psalm 138

- True worship: (1) Confess God's attributes and actions and (2) give thanks to Him for who He is and what He has done.
- We are not immune from trouble, nor are we overwhelmed by trouble.
- We must trust God to fulfill His purpose in our lives—even in the midst of trouble.