

Psalms: Expository Theology of Psalm Eight

Author: Dr. Bruce Waltke | **Session** 10

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Bruce Waltke presents an expository theology of Psalm 8, identifying it as the first hymn of praise in the Psalter and analyzing its structural inclusio and alternating stanzas. He explores the contrast between the vastness of God's creation and the profound dignity granted to humanity, who are commissioned as divine vice-gerents to exercise dominion over the earth. Through linguistic exegesis and philosophical reflection—including discussion of divine attributes, cosmic fine-tuning, and human epistemological dependence on God—Waltke demonstrates how humble praise overcomes spiritual enemies. Ultimately, the source highlights the tension between humanity's physical technological achievements and spiritual need for God's redemptive grace.

Outline

I. Introduction and Orientation to the Lecture

- A. Speaker and Session Details: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Psalm 8 (Session 10)
- B. Opening Prayer for Spiritual Understanding and Honoring God
- C. Sponsorship: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

II. Context of Psalm 8 in Form Criticism and the Psalter

A. Form Critical Category: The Hymn of Praise

- 1. Motifs: Call to praise and causes for praise
- 2. Divine Attributes: Incommunicable (aseity, eternity, omnipotence) vs. Communicable (mercy, grace, faithfulness)
- 3. Incomparability of Yahweh and Critique of Evolutionary Views of Religion

B. Transition from Old to New Testament Redemptive History

- 1. Old Testament: Centripetal movement (nations come to Jerusalem/Israel)
- 2. New Testament: Centrifugal movement (church sent into all the world)

C. Canonical Placement of Psalm 8 in the Psalter

- 1. Psalms 1–2 as Gateway and Coronation Liturgy
- 2. Psalms 3–7 as Psalms of Distress and Lament
- 3. Psalm 8 as the First Hymn of Praise in the Psalter

4. Canonical Contrast: Psalm 8 (human dignity) paired with Psalm 14 (human depravity)

III. Structural and Rhetorical Framework of Psalm 8

A. Envelope Structure (Inclusio)

1. Opening and Closing Refrain: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" (vv. 1a, 9)
2. Declaration of Praise rather than mere call to praise

B. Two Alternating Stanzas

1. Stanza 1 (vv. 1b–4): Divine splendor in creation and redemption through humble praise
2. Stanza 2 (vv. 5–8): Divine majesty in the night sky and the crowning of humanity to rule

IV. Detailed Exegesis and Theological Reflection on Psalm 8

A. Verse 1: The Majesty of the Divine Name

1. Divine Names: Yahweh (Tetragrammaton) and Adonai ("Our Master")
2. Meaning of Adir ("Majestic/Mighty") in covenantal context
3. Philosophical Reflection: Ontological vs. Epistemological knowledge of God
 - a. Ontological reality vs. human perception
 - b. Necessity of human praise (Luke 19: stones crying out)

B. Verses 1b–2: God's Splendor and the Strength of Babes

1. Preposition 'al ("upon the heavens") and phenomenological language
2. Cosmic Scale: Modern astronomy, Hubble discoveries, and the anthropic cosmological principle
3. Exegesis of Verse 2: "Mouth of babes and infants"
 - a. Metonymy and hyperbole for humble, vulnerable believers
 - b. Praise and petition as a spiritual bulwark (citadel) against enemies

C. Verses 3–4: Cosmic Expanse vs. Human Frailty

1. Gazing at the Night Sky: Moon and stars as permanent creation (work of fingers)
2. Human Frailty: Nuances of Hebrew terms for man (Enosh, Adam, Ish, Gebor)
3. Divine Care: Meaning of Pakad ("visiting/taking note with redemptive action")

D. Verses 5–8: The Dignity and Commission of Humanity

1. Contrast with Secular Views of Humanity (political animal, tool-using animal, mistake)
2. Biblical Dignity: "Crowned with glory and honor", made a little lower than Elohim (heavenly beings/angels)
3. Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1): Subduing and ruling physical and spiritual creation
4. Contrast between Technological Advancement and Moral/Spiritual Failure

E. Verses 7–8: The Domain of Ruled Creatures

1. Merism of Domesticated vs. Wild Beasts (forces of life and death)
2. Birds of Sky and Fish of Sea
3. Singular Leviathan as Symbol of Chaos and Evil Conquered under Human Feet

F. Verse 9: Conclusion of the Inclusio

1. Reiteration of God's majestic name across all the earth

2. Affirmation of God's victory mediated through His humble people