

Visual Commentary:

# Psalm 8

STUDY NOTES

Our Visual Commentary series zooms in to look at specific verses passages of Scripture. These passages may be short, but they're packed with rich wisdom that can teach us key things about the biblical story and what it means to be a modern Jesus follower. These study notes will take you deeper into the ideas explored in our video Visual Commentary: Psalm 8.

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# The Translation and Literary Design of Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is a beautiful meditation on humanity’s place in the cosmos and the purposes of God. The poem is clearly based on the portrait of humanity found in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and it explores the themes of the image of God and humanity as God’s co-ruling partners in the world. The themes may be familiar to you, but this passage explores key biblical ideas with different imagery and poetic flourish.

## Psalm 8

O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the land! You have set your splendour above the skies!	<b>A</b> Yahweh is creator-king of the land and the skies.
From the mouth of infants and nursing babes you have established a stronghold,	<b>B</b> Yet he elevates small, insignificant creatures to accomplish his purpose.
Because of your adversaries, to stop the enemy and the avenger.	<b>C</b> Over against hostile forces.
When I consider your skies, the works of your fingers, moon and stars, which you established,	<b>A'</b> Yahweh is creator-king of the skies.
What is human that you remember him, and the son of humanity that you attend to him? Though you have made him little lesser than elohim, yet with glory and majesty you have crowned him! You made him a ruler over the works of your hands, all things you have set under his feet,	<b>B'</b> Yet he elevates insignificant creatures to accomplish his purpose.
Sheep and oxen, all of them, and also beasts of the field, birds of the skies and fish of the sea, what crosses the paths of the seas.	<b>C'</b> Over against untamed creatures
O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the land!	<b>A''</b> Yahweh is creator-king of the land

# Quotations and Echoes of Psalm 8 in the New Testament

Psalm 8 was an important resource for Jesus and the apostles. As they sought to explain who Jesus was and how he brought the biblical storyline to its fulfillment, they quoted from and referenced Psalm 8.

## Jesus in Matthew 21

*When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me."*

MATTHEW 21:1-2 (NASB95)

*Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of him, and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh. Hosanna in the highest!" [from Psalm 118]. When he had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."*

MATTHEW 21:8-11 (NASB95)

*But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to him, "Do you hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read the Scriptures, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?" [from Psalm 8].*

MATTHEW 21:15-16 (NASB95)

Jesus makes clear that Psalm 8 is about how God is enthroning a son of man figure who embodies the ideal humanity of Genesis 1. But the heralds that God has chosen are little children, those of low social status (see Matthew 18:1-3).

## Paul in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians

Paul also references Psalm 8 to make key points about the realities of God's upside-down Kingdom.

*For just as in Adam all die, so also in Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Messiah the first fruits, after that those who belong to the Messiah when at his coming, then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.*

*For "he has put all things under his feet" [from Psalm 8].*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:22-27 (ESV)

*[God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty strength that he worked in the Messiah when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

EPHESIANS 1:19-23 (ESV)

In Paul's mind, the "Adam" of Genesis 1 was not the ultimate fulfillment of this poem or of the role created for humanity in Genesis 1. Rather, the Messiah Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, is the true human, the son of man.

Paul takes the elevation of humanity over creation as a forward pointing, messianic image that was fulfilled in Jesus. Notice that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul combines the wording of Psalm 8 with Psalm 110: "all his enemies under his feet."

It's important to consider how Jesus and the apostles arrived at this understanding of Psalm 8. They were raised to read the Psalms scroll as a coherent collection of poems that advances a set of themes and messages as they progress from beginning to end. To understand why they read Psalm 8 this way, we need to look at the composition and design of the beginning of the Psalms scroll.

## Psalm 8 in the Context of the Psalms Scroll

### The Macro-Design of the Psalms Scroll

	Book 1 Psalms 1-41	Book 2 Psalms 42-72	Book 3 Psalms 73-89	Book 4 Psalms 90-106	Book 5 Psalms 107-150
1&2					146
					147
					148
					149
					150
	<b>41:13</b> ↓	<b>72:18-20</b> ↓	<b>89:51</b> ↓	<b>106:48</b> ↓	
"May Yahweh the Elohim of Israel be blessed...forever...'amen and 'amen"					

### The Macro-Design of Book 1 (Psalms 1-41)

1	2	3-14		15-24	25-34	35-41
		3-7	8	9-10	11-14	

### Book 1 According to Gianni Barbiero and Peter Ho

1	2	3-14		15-24	25-34	35-41
		3-7	8	9	10-14	

Within Book 1 (Psalms 1-41) there are five parts:

- Introduction: Psalms 1-2
- Four sub-groups of poems linked together by key repeated words and themes
  - Psalm 3-14
  - Psalm 15-24
  - Psalm 25-34
  - Psalm 35-41

There is still some ambiguity about whether Psalm 8 alone is the center of Psalms 3-14, or if Psalm 8 has been paired with Psalm 9-10 (one psalm in the Septuagint) as the center.

For more on this, see *The Design of the Psalter: A Macro-Structural Analysis* by Peter Ho.

## Psalms 1-2: The Introduction

Psalms 1-2 begin and end with the same word, indicating the united twin themes of each.

*Blessed* is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked...  
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.

PSALM 1:1-2

*Blessed* are all who take refuge  
in [the messianic son of God].

PSALM 2:12

Psalm 1 is a portrait of a new “Joshua,” who meditates on the Torah of Yahweh day and night. This figure then turns into an eternal tree of life enjoyed by the righteous on the day of final justice.

Psalm 2 is a portrait of the promised king from David’s line (see 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 9, 11, Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, 37). He will bring God’s rule over the hostile nations and rescue the poor and afflicted.

## Psalm 2: Translation and Literary Design

<p>a Why do the nations roar, and the peoples meditate on empty matters?</p> <p>b The kings of the land take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against his anointed, saying,</p> <p>c “Let us tear about their bonds, and let’s cast off their cords from us!”</p>	<p><b>Verses 1-3</b></p> <p>The poet describes the kings’ rebellion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The nations roar</li> <li>b. They rebel against Yahweh</li> <li>c. Their speech is rebellious</li> </ul>
<p>a The one sitting in the skies, he laughs, Yahweh mocks at them,</p> <p>b then he will speak to them in his anger and in his hot-anger he will terrify them, saying,</p> <p>c “As for me I have anointed my King, upon Zion, my holy mountain.”</p>	<p><b>Verses 4-6</b></p> <p>Yahweh’s response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Yahweh laughs</li> <li>b. He responds in anger</li> <li>c. Yahweh’s counterspeech</li> </ul>
<p>“I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the land as your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and like a potter’s vessel, you shall shatter them.”</p>	<p><b>Verses 7-9</b></p> <p>The anointed king tells us about Yahweh’s decree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Divine sonship</li> <li>b. Kingdom over all nations</li> <li>c. Victory over enemies</li> </ul>
<p>And now, kings, show discernment; be warned, O judges of the land. Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he become angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath burns in an instant, how blessed are all who take refuge in him!</p>	<p><b>Verses 10-12</b></p> <p>The poet’s warning to the rebellious kings</p>

Psalm 2 is about how God will raise up a king from the line of David to bring justice to bear on the violent nations of our world and establish the Kingdom of God. This elevation of the messianic son of God will result in refuge for those who suffer under the brutal rule of these empires.

So who is this king? 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings state that it is not David, Solomon, or any of the kings from his line, who all ended up imprisoned in Babylonian exile. However, in Samuel-Kings, David's story from the past (about how God rescued him from Saul, Absalom, and all the enemy nations around him) became a pattern for the future exaltation of his seed (see 2 Samuel 7).

What God did for David will be true of what God does for the coming king from the lineage of David.

## Psalms 3-14: Design and Main Themes

This section of 11 poems is arranged in two clusters around a central pair of poems, Psalms 8 and 9-10.

If you look at just the superscription headings to each poem, you can see a patterned arrangement.

3	A song of David		when he fled from Absalom his son		
4	For the leader	on stringed instruments		A song of David	
5	For the leader		for the flutes	A song of David	
6	For the leader	on stringed instruments	upon the eighth string/note	A song of David	
7			A lament of David	which he sang to Yahweh about the words of Cush the Benjamite	
8	For the leader		about <i>gittit</i>		
9-10	For the leader		about the death of the son	A song of David	
11	For the leader			Of David	
12	For the leader		upon the eighth string/note	A song of David	
13	For the leader			A song of David	
14	For the leader			Of David	





Psalms 3-7 are arranged in a symmetry that begins and ends by referring to stories of David's flight and persecution by enemies.

Psalms 11-14 are also arranged in a symmetry. These four poems focus on cries for deliverance from enemies.

It's important to note Psalm 9-10 is actually one poem (treated as such in the Septuagint). Let's look at the first chunk of poems, Psalms 3-7.

### **Psalms 3-7**

These are five poems about how David was on the run from his enemies in the days of King Saul and in the days of Absalom.

*O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are those rising against me; many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.*

PSALM 3:1-7: A PSALMS OF DAVID  
WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON

*Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me apart like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.*

PSALM 7:1-2 (NIV)

*Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies. Make your way straight before me. Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies.*

PSALM 5:8-10 (NIV)

### **Psalms 9-14**

This is a group of psalms by David, but they're not only about him, as he includes himself among a group called the "poor and afflicted ones," who trust that God will deliver them.

*Yahweh is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. Sing the praises of Yahweh, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.*

PSALM 9:9-12 (NIV)

*Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts....*

PSALM 12:1-2 (NIV)

*Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.*

PSALM 10:12-15 (NIV)

*"Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise," says Yahweh. "I will protect them."*

PSALM 12:5

The major motif in Psalms 3-14 is that David and the afflicted ones are threatened by enemies. They then cry out to God, who promises to deliver and exalt them above their adversaries. The vocabulary of “enemies” and language surrounding being God’s chosen ones permeates Psalms 3-14.

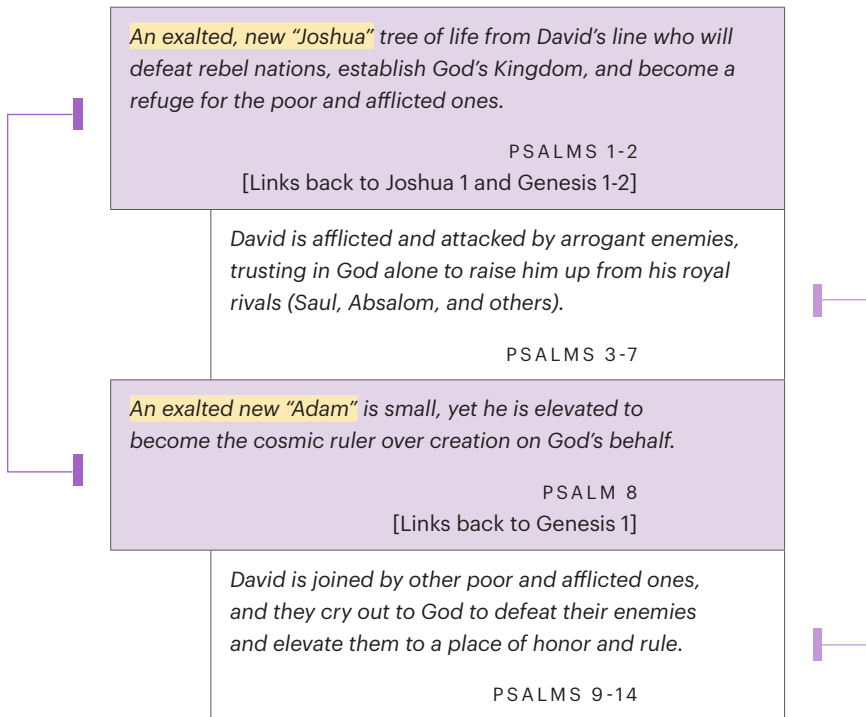
Terms for the “Bad Guys” in Psalms 3-14			
	Psalms 3-7	Psalm 8	Psalms 9-14
Oppressors	3:2; 4:2; 6:8; 7:5, 7	8:3	10:5; 13:5
Enemies	3:8; 6:11; 7:6	8:3	9:4, 7; 13:3, 5
The wicked	3:8; 5:5-6, 7:10		9:17, 18; 10:1, 4, 13, 15; 11:2, 5, 6; 12:9
The peoples / nations	5:6; 6:9		9:6, 9, 16, 18, 20
Evil-doers	5:6; 6:9		14:4

Terms for God’s people and Those Associated with David in Psalm 3-14				
	Psalm 3-7	Psalm 8	Psalms 9-10	Psalms 11-14
Loyal one / the faithful	3:4			12:2
The righteous	5:13; 7:10, 12			11:3, 5, 7; 14:5
The upright of heart / the upright	7:10			11:2, 7
Infants and babies		8:3		
The afflicted			9:13, 14, 19; 10:2, 9; 10:12, 17	12:6; 14:6
The poor			9:19	12:6
The innocent			10:8	
The crushed			9:10; 10:18	
The helpless			10:8, 10, 14	
The orphan			10:14, 18	
Those who seek you			9:11	
Those who love your name / those who know your name	5:12		9:11	
Those who take refuge in you	5:12			
His people / Israel / Jacob				14:7

And right in the middle of all this is Psalm 8, which is about how God confronts his enemies with the words of children. This is about the elevation of small, insignificant humans to rule the cosmos in Genesis 1.

## Psalms 1-14 As a Whole

When we put all the pieces together, we get a fascinating thematic portrait of Psalms 1-14.



## Psalm 8: Interpretive Notes

All of this so far is the context for understanding Psalm 8. Now let's look closer at Psalm 8, specifically the inclusio in verses 1 and 9. Inclusio is a literary term that refers to a repeated word or phrase at the beginning and end of a section of text. Think of it like bookends. This literary device clues us in to what's important in the passage. What is found in between the bookends is an explanation of the significance of the repeated words.

## Use of Inclusio in Psalm 8

“Majesty” is the repeated word in Psalm 8. The use of “splendor” in verse 1 is close in meaning and connected to this use of inclusio. What do these words mean in the original Hebrew?

O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name (שִׁמְךָ) in all the land! You have set your splendor above the skies (שָׁמַיִם)!
VERSE 1
VERSES 2-8
O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name (שִׁמְךָ) in all the land!
VERSE 9

Majestic - Hebrew *'addir* / אָדִיר, meaning powerful

You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty (Heb. <i>'addirim</i> ) waters.
EXODUS 15:10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>'Addir</i> nations (Ezekiel 32:18)</li><li>• <i>'Addir</i> kings (Psalm 136:18)</li><li>• <i>'Addir</i> cedar trees (Zechariah 11:2)</li></ul>

Splendor - Hebrew *hod* / הוֹד, meaning impressive appearance or powerful ethos

- Of a king: “Through victory you give... *hod* and honor [to the king] (Psalm 21:5).
- Of a leader: “Give to [Joshua] some of your *hod* so that the entire assembly of Israel will listen to him (Numbers 27:20).
- Of an olive tree: “Like the *hod* of an olive tree” (Hosea 14:6).

Psalm 8 opens and closes by linking Yahweh’s own royal power directly to the physical manifestation of that power—the cosmos itself, the land and skies.

Note the wordplay between “name” (*shem*) and “skies” (*shemayim*).

## Key Phrases

<p><b>A</b></p> <p>O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name (שמך) in all the land! You have set your splendor above the skies (שמים)!</p>	<p>A. Yahweh is creator-king of the land and the skies...</p>
<p><b>B</b></p> <p>From the mouth of infants and nursing babes you have established a stronghold,</p>	<p>B. Yet he elevates small, insignificant creatures to accomplish his purpose.</p>
<p>because of your adversaries, to stop the enemy and the avenger.</p>	<p>C. Over against hostile forces</p>

This section is full of dense, puzzling imagery, but the basic point is clear. In contrast to his divine royal power, Yahweh uses the “mouths of babes” to build a stronghold and bring an end to the enemies, adversaries, and avengers.

This section is like a riddle, and the meaning only becomes clear when the images are connected to the surrounding psalms. Let’s take a look.

### “Children and nursing infants” (עוללים ויונקים)

- “Infants” (עוללים): used 11 times in the Hebrew Bible
- “Nursing babies” (יונק): used 18 times in the Hebrew Bible
  - Refers to helpless victims of war (1 Samuel 15:3; 22:19; 2 Kings 8:12; Hosea 14:1; Lamentations 2:11; 4:4)
  - Used in the merism “from babies to old” (Deuteronomy 32:15; Joel 2:16)
  - Used in the merism “from infants to nursing babies” (1 Samuel 15:5; 22:19; Jeremiah 44:7; Lamentations 2:11; 4:4)
  - Used to refer to the helpless, vulnerable one in contrast to dangerous snakes (Isaiah 11:8)
  - Used to describe the suffering servant of Yahweh (Isa 53:2), likened to a dry plant-shoot

“Infants and babies” refers to a powerless and helpless group of people who are used by Yahweh to establish places of refuge in the world, specifically, Yahweh’s own refuge.

Though these two words are not found elsewhere in Psalms 3-14, they connect to the larger portrait of the “poor and afflicted,” who are Yahweh’s chosen instruments through whom his Kingdom and reign are established on Earth.

The Davidic king in Psalm 2 turns out to be the persecuted and afflicted king of Psalms 3-14, who is fleeing from his enemies (Saul and Absalom) and seeking refuge in Yahweh.

The messianic king is associated with a plural group who call themselves “the afflicted ones” and other similar titles. Psalm 9-10 is the paired center poem in this group, and it fills out the portrait of these afflicted ones.

*Yahweh also will be a fortress for the oppressed,  
A fortress in times of oppression;  
And those who know your name will put their trust in you,  
For you, Yahweh, have not forsaken those who seek you*

PSALM 9:9-10

*For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.  
Be gracious to me, Yahweh!  
See my affliction from those who hate me,  
O you who lift me up from the gates of death,*

PSALM 9:12-13

*For the needy shall not always be forgotten,  
and the hope of the afflicted shall not perish forever.*

PSALM 9:18

*In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted;  
let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.*

PSALM 10:2

*Arise, Yahweh; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted.  
Why does the wicked renounce God  
and say in his heart, “You will not call to account?”  
But you do see, you notice trouble and upheaval,  
that you may take it into your hands;  
to you the helpless commits himself;  
you have been the helper of the fatherless.*

PSALM 10:12-14

*“God uses the mouth of ‘babes and sucklings,’ in some manner, to establish (his) ‘strength,’ on account of the presence, or existence, of enemies... Enemies symbolize human strength; they are arrogant in their self-assertion.... Babies, on the other hand, symbolize human weakness and humility, but they have a strength greater than that of God’s enemies when they take the name of God on their lips... Thus God may utilize the weak of this world, even the child, both to establish his strength, reflected in his nature and in his creation, and at the same time ‘to put at rest’ (or quiet) the opposition of enemies.” — PETER C. CRAIGIE, PSALMS 1-50, 2ND ED., WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY, P. 107.*

## “You have established a stronghold”

The word used here for established (נָסַד) is used in the Bible to refer to the founding of city walls (Joshua 6:26, Jericho’s walls), the wall-stones of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 5:17, 6:37, 7:10), and the foundations of the second temple (Ezra 3:10-12). Let’s look at some other examples of this word in Scripture.

When the cosmos is metaphorically likened to a building, one can speak of its “founding.”

- Job 38:4: “Where were you when I founded the land?”
- Psalm 24:1: “The land is Yahweh’s...he founded it upon the seas.”
- Psalm 102:25: “You founded the land from ancient times.”
- Proverbs 3:19: “By wisdom, Yahweh founded the land.”

Zion/Jerusalem is an icon of Yahweh's temple presence and can be identified as a place of divine refuge.

- Isaiah 14:32: "The Lord has founded Zion, and in her his afflicted ones will find refuge."
- Isaiah 28:16: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone. A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly founded. He who trusts it will not be disturbed."

This line is developing the new temple theme that is at work in the Prophets and Psalms. Yahweh is establishing and founding a new temple-citadel, a new Jerusalem among the nations, but it's not in the form of a building. Rather, it is founded in and among his afflicted and helpless people, who find their refuge in Yahweh alone. The use of the word "founding" is part of the new temple theme.

"Strength, stronghold" (רַחֲמַי) can refer to general power or strength.

*The strength of Yahweh's arm in the Exodus.*

EXODUS 15:13 (SEE ALSO ISAIAH 51:9-10)

*Yahweh gives strength to his king.*

1 SAMUEL 2:10

*Yahweh's strength is connected to his power to rule the cosmos.*

PSALM 93:1

This word can also metaphorically refer to buildings, towers, or fortresses that have power to protect, as in a stronghold.

*"A tower of strength," where people flee for protection against an army.*

JUDGES 9:51

*City walls are attacked and "pillars of strength" fall to the ground.*

EZEKIEL 26:11

*"A city of strength," which Yahweh provides for the deliverance of his people.*

ISAIAH 26:1

*"Enemies will surround the land and bring down your stronghold, and your citadels will be plundered."*

AMOS 3:11

*Zion is given strength by Yahweh to defend its inhabitants.*

ISAIAH 52:1

*"Wealth is a city of strength."*

PROVERBS 10:15

Yahweh's presence in the temple is a place of strength and safety.

- Isaiah 45:24: "In Yahweh alone are deliverance and strength."
- Psalm 84:4-5: "Fortunate are those who dwell in your house... fortunate are those whose strength is in you."
- See also Psalm 89:14-18.

Stronghold is also equated with refuge (מחסה) as a place of safety.

*For you have been my refuge, a tower  
of strength against the foe.*

PSALM 61:3

*Whoever fears the Lord has a strong place of  
trust, and for their children it will be a refuge.*

PROVERBS 14:26

*You are my refuge of strength.*

PSALM 71:7

The fact that the word strength is combined with founded/established (טוּי), a clear architectural term, shows that the word is being used as a metaphor to describe a “strong building” in which people find refuge.

The fact that Yahweh himself is a place of refuge is a repeated motif in the Psalms, especially in the opening movement of Psalms 3-14.

*Fortunate are all who take refuge in him [the messianic king]*

PSALM 2:12

*O Lord my God, in you I have taken refuge;*

*Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me.*

PSALM 7:1

*But let all who take refuge in you be glad,*

*Let them ever sing for joy;*

*And may you shelter them,*

*That those who love your name may exult in you.*

*For it is you who blesses the righteous,*

*O Lord, you surround him with favor as with a shield.*

PSALM 5:11-12

Why does Jesus quote this line and say “praise” instead of strength?

Matthew’s account is written in Greek, and he has adopted the standard Greek translation of Psalm 8 that was common in his day, where the translator (centuries earlier) rendered “strength” (τυ) with the Greek word praise (ἄιμος).

The Greek Septuagint translator seems to have rendered this word as praise because of the context of the “mouth of babes” and the connection to Yahweh’s name (8:1, 9). The word strength is sometimes the content of someone’s praise to Yahweh.

*Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

PSALM 29:1 (NIV)

*Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over  
Israel, whose power is in the heavens.*

PSALM 68:34 (NIV)

Also significant is the fact that this word ‘oz appears in the beginning of the Song of Sea poem found in Exodus 15:1-2.

The riddle of the babies whose words (likely praise of Yahweh) build a fortress where the weak can find refuge from the violent and powerful is first unpacked by the connection to the surrounding Psalms 3-14. But it is also unpacked by the symmetrical second half of this poem in 8:4-8. Let’s take a look.



## The Second Half of the Poem

<p>When I consider <b>your skies</b> (שמיים),  <b>the works of your fingers,</b>          moon and stars, which you established,</p>	<p>A: Yahweh is creator-king of the skies...</p>
<p>What is <b>human</b> that you remember him,          and <b>the son of humanity</b> that you attend to him?  <sup>5</sup>Though you have made him little lesser than <b>elohim</b>,          yet with <b>glory</b> and <b>majesty</b> you have <b>crowned him!</b>  <sup>6</sup>You made <b>him</b> a ruler over <b>the works of your hands,</b>          all things you have set under <b>his feet,</b></p>	<p>B: Yet he elevates insignificant creatures          to accomplish his purpose...</p>
<p>Sheep and oxen, all of them,          and also beasts of the field,          Birds of the skies and fish of the sea,          what crosses the paths of the seas.</p>	<p>C: Over against the untamed creatures</p>

On one level, this is a meditation on the exaltation of the dirt creature of Genesis 1-2 to be God's co-ruler over creation.

- "Made a little lesser than *elohim*"
  - *Elohim*: Yahweh, the one Elohim
  - *Elohim*: spiritual beings, the "us" of Genesis 1:26. This is how the Septuagint translated it.
- "Crowned with glory *and* majesty" could refer to the following:
  - The royal honor of being declared God's partner in ruling the world
  - Some kind of physical manifestation of God's royal power, like taking on the divine light (Moses' shining face in Exodus 33 or Jesus' high priestly glow in Mark 9)

It seems clear that Paul would have seen this as a reference to Daniel 7, Psalm 110, and the victory of the suffering son of man over the powers of death, depicted here as animals. Daniel 7 describes a son of man who is exalted over the animals and shares in God's rule over the nations. It appears that Daniel 7 is developing the ideas of Psalm 8 in tandem with many other texts from throughout the Hebrew Bible.

## Connecting Ideas in Psalm 8

Psalm 8 praises Yahweh for his rule over the world, evidenced by the order and goodness of creation itself. The poet also celebrates how Yahweh uses weak and vulnerable people to accomplish his purposes in the world.

This theme is first explored in the short riddle in 8:1-3, using imagery like babies, strongholds, and enemies that assumes the reader has been tracking with the themes of Psalms 3-14.

In 8:4-9, this “weak one exalted to rule” is then compared to the portraits of humans from Genesis 1. There the puny humans are exalted to rule all creation, even though they are far less impressive than the heavenly hosts.

The alignment of all of the “weak exalted” figures is an invitation for the reader to link them altogether:

- The exalted messianic king of Psalms 1-2
- The exalted yet weak and vulnerable David of Psalms 3-7
- The exalted yet weak and vulnerable babies and humans of Psalm 8
- The exalted yet weak and vulnerable David and afflicted ones of Psalms 9-14

Interestingly, this is precisely the interpretation of Psalm 8 that we find in Hebrews 2.

*For he did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, “What is man, that you remember him? Or the son of man, that you are concerned about him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in subjecting all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

HEBREWS 2:5-9 (NASB95)