

Psalm 138

“I will praise thee with my whole heart”
A Psalm of David

Psalm 138: This psalm of thanksgiving begins with individual praise (verses 1-3), but looks forward to universal praise (verses 4-6). The praise offered to God does not change the contemporary troubles, but the psalmist does expect deliverance from them (verses 7-8).

Verses 1-8: The next 8 psalms were written by David (Psalms 138-145), and are his last in the Psalter. The occasion is unknown, although it's possible that David wrote them in response to the Davidic Covenant (compare 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 16).

- I. Individual Praise (138:1-3);
- II. International Praise (138:4-5);
- III. Invincible Praise (138:6-8).

Psalm 138:1 "I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee."

“The gods”: This can refer to either pagan royalty (compare Psalm 82:1), and/or to the idols they worship.

Here is David's proclamation that he will testify of the Lord among all audiences (“Before the gods will I sign praise unto thee”), even those who reject God. Christians can be unashamed in their praise, because they exalt the only true and Living God.

We see that the psalmist here is saying, I may be in an alien land, but I am not ashamed to praise my God. The gods that he was going to sing praises before are the false gods of this evil land. His heart was so full of His God, that he would have praised the LORD, even if they had killed him for it.

Psalm 138:2 "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name."

“Holy temple”: Refers to the tabernacle since Solomon's temple has not yet been built.

“Thy word ... thy name”: Most likely this means that God's latest revelation (“Your word”), exceeded all previous revelation about God. This would be in concert with David's prayer (2 Sam. 7:18-29), after he received the Davidic promise (2 Sam. 7:12-14, 16).

In the midst of trouble, David thanks God for His truth and His mercy rooted in His steadfast love for His people (“loving-kindness”; see note on 6:4). God's “name” encompasses everything

about God: all His attributes, all His power, all His grace. Yet, as great as God is, His Word is lifted above all else as proof that it can be trusted.

One of my friends wrote a song that said look to the temple and pray. Not that the prayer would be heard any better that way, but it reminded the psalmist of the times he had gone to the temple to pray. It helped the psalmist in remembering. It also helped him remember the blessings that the LORD had brought. God's lovingkindness was a pleasure to remember. It helped him remember that this captivity would pass away, if he kept the faith. In the Word of God, there is the promise of deliverance. The psalmist knows that God has elevated His Word even above His name. He will deliver him, because His Word says so.

Psalm 138:3 "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, [and] strengthenedst me [with] strength in my soul."

When in distress through Saul's persecution, he cried to the Lord, and he immediately answered him, and delivered him out of his troubles. And such immediate answers of prayer are to be remembered with thankfulness (see Psalm 18:6).

"And strengthenedst me with strength in my soul": Put him good heart and spirit, when before ready to faint. Strengthened his heart and grace in it, particularly faith, and drew it forth into lively act and exercise so that he sunk not under the weight of affliction and trouble. But was filled with courage to withstand his enemies, and with strength to do the will and work of God. This is to be understood of inward spiritual strength (see Eph. 3:16).

Many times the answer to a prayer comes in our heart long before the answer becomes a reality. God answered this prayer immediately. The manifestation will come later.

Psalm 138:4 "All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth."

Or "let them confess", or "praise thee"; a wish or prayer. Not only the kings known to David, as Kimchi limits it; or that lived in his days, as Hiram and others. But in the latter day, when they shall come to Zion, the church, and be nursing fathers to it. And shall serve and worship the King Messiah (Isa. 49:23).

"When they hear the words of thy mouth": Either the promises of it fulfilled not only with respect to David; but the Messiah. And his church and people, in the latter day, even the glorious things spoken thereof. Or the doctrines of the Gospel, which are the words of his mouth, and more desirable than thousands of gold and silver. And which, when kings shall hear so as to understand, they will praise the Lord for them (see Isa. 52:15). The Targum is, "the words of thy praise."

“All the kings” (In contrast to Psalm 2:1-3, compare Psalms 68:32; 72:11-12; 96:1, 3, 7-8; 97:1; 98:4; 100:1; 102:15; 148:11).

Kings are elevated in this earth, but the way for them to come to the Lord is the same as for anyone else. Many times it is harder for people who are thought of as something special on the earth, to humble themselves and come to God. It is very easy to get self-centered, if your peers have elevated you to stardom. There is a time when every eye shall see Him, and all will bow their knee to Him.

Romans 14:11 "For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Psalm 138:5 "Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great [is] the glory of the LORD."

Which are all mercy and truth. Ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace. So the eunuch went on his way, and in the ways of the Lord rejoicing (Acts 8:39). Or, "they shall sing of the ways of the Lord"; of the excellency, pleasure, and usefulness of them.

"For great is the glory of the Lord": Shown in the works of creation. More especially in the person of Christ, and in the glorious work of redemption and salvation by him. And of which there will be a great display throughout the earth in the latter day, by means of the Gospel. The great spread of it, and the multitude of persons converted by it. Which will make the ways of the Lord still more pleasant (see Isa. 6:3).

This has to be speaking prophetically of the time when the Lord Jesus will preach, and they all hear and believe. This has to be a supernatural understanding such a sin in the next verse.

Ephesians 1:17 "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:"

Verses 6-7: David see himself as "the lowly" and his enemies as "the proud".

Psalm 138:6 "Though the LORD [be] high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off."

"The proud" distance themselves from God, believing they do not need Him. By necessity, God deals with them for "afar"; it is their choice. The "lowly" recognize their need. In times of humility; the Lord draws near.

We have discussed how difficult it is for the proud to humble themselves long enough to come unto the Lord. The humble, on the other hand, think of themselves in a different light. They seek the Savior, because they know that they have need to be saved. The proud are too proud to admit they need a Savior.

Psalm 138:7 "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me."

Trouble attends the best of men. Both outward and inward trouble, from sin, Satan, and the world. Yea, they are in the midst of it, surrounded with it. And it is a way in which they walk through this world, and enter the kingdom of heaven. It is continued unto them; it is a long walk, and yet will have an end (see Psalm 23:4).

"Thou wilt revive me": Preserve his life amidst all his troubles. Support him under them, make him cheerful and fearless. Revive his work of grace in him, quicken him to the lively exercise of grace, and fervent discharge of duty. This the Lord does by his gracious presence, by the discoveries of his love, and by the application of precious promises.

"Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies": To stop and restrain it. Which he can easily do, when most violent and outrageous (Psalm 76:10). Or, "against the nose of mine enemies". Strike them on the nose, as men do unruly horses to stop them. Or give a slap on their face with the left hand, as Arama observes, the right being mentioned next.

"And thy right hand shall save me": For that has saving strength in it (Psalm 20:6). This may be understood of Christ, who is not only the man of his right hand, but is the right hand of his righteousness. By whom he saves his people with a spiritual and eternal salvation, as well as with a temporal one (Isa. 41:10).

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. The time we know for sure He is with us (if we are a believer), is when we are in terrible trouble. The Right Hand of God is Jesus. He saved us from sin and death on the cross. He will still save us from harm.

Psalm 138:8 "The LORD will perfect [that which] concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, [endureth] for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

“Perfect”: Refers to God’s work in David’s life, specially the Davidic Covenant (compare 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 16). To “Perfect” means God is using an experience “to mature or strengthen or complete” His servant. Pressures help to eliminate the unimportant things that separate believers from fellowship with God. In the midst of their troubles, God remakes and renews them.

When we are first saved, we are babes in Christ. As we walk with the Lord each day, the Holy Spirit teaches us the things we must know. The Lord continues working on us and perfecting us, until the day we go home to be with Him. The works of His own hands are all of His creation, which includes us.

Psalm 138 Questions

1. I will praise thee with my whole _____.
2. What gods was he going to sing praises before of his God?
3. He worshipped toward what?

4. Why did the psalmist do this?
5. In the Word of God, there was a promise of _____.
6. What two things was he going to praise His name for?
7. In 138:3, where was he strengthened?
8. What is the way for a king to come to the Lord?
9. God hath respect for the _____.
10. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt _____ me.
11. Verse 8 says, forsake not what?
12. How long does the Lord continue to work on us to perfect us?