

Psalms 8:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

Analysis

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. This majestic opening immediately establishes the psalm's theme: God's transcendent glory revealed through creation. The Hebrew text's wordplay is lost in English translation. "LORD" renders Yahweh (יהוה), God's personal covenant name, while "Lord" translates Adonai (אֲדֹנָי), meaning master or sovereign. David addresses God as "Yahweh our Adonai"—combining covenant intimacy with sovereign authority.

"How excellent" (mah addir, מַה־אַדִּיר) expresses wonder at God's majestic, magnificent, glorious name. The word addir suggests might, nobility, and splendor. David isn't offering a calm theological statement but an exclamation of awe-struck worship. The rhetorical question ("How excellent!") invites meditation rather than providing answers—God's glory surpasses human ability to fully comprehend or articulate.

"Thy name in all the earth" establishes the universal scope of God's glory. God's "name" in Hebrew thought represents His full character, reputation, and revealed nature. Unlike local deities of ancient Near Eastern religions, Yahweh's glory fills the entire earth. There is no corner of creation where His excellence is not evident. David may have written this psalm while gazing at night sky as a shepherd, overwhelmed by creation's testimony to the Creator.

"Who hast set thy glory above the heavens" presents theological tension: God's

glory fills earth yet transcends even the heavens. The verb "set" (tenah, תָּנַח) means to give, ascribe, or place. Some translations render it "Your glory is displayed above the heavens," suggesting even the vast cosmos cannot contain God's splendor. God is both immanent (present in creation) and transcendent (infinitely beyond it).

Christologically, this verse anticipates the Incarnation. The God whose glory transcends the heavens took on human flesh (John 1:14). Jesus is both Yahweh and Adonai—the covenant God and sovereign Lord. The "name above every name" (Philippians 2:9) that Paul celebrates echoes Psalm 8's worship of God's excellent name.

Historical Context

Psalm 8 is classified as a creation psalm, celebrating God's glory as revealed through the natural world. While Genesis 1-2 narrates creation systematically, Psalm 8 responds to creation with wonder and worship. Ancient Israel's neighbors developed elaborate cosmologies featuring multiple creator deities, cosmic battles, and capricious gods. Against this backdrop, Psalm 8 presents stunning simplicity: one God, sovereign and glorious, whose work reveals His character.

The superscription attributes this psalm to David and links it with "Gittith," possibly a musical instrument from Gath or a particular tune. Whether David wrote it as a shepherd youth overwhelmed by starry skies, or as king reflecting on God's glory, the psalm expresses universal human experience: awe at creation's vastness and beauty pointing beyond itself to the Creator.

Ancient Israelites didn't separate natural and revealed theology as modernity does. For them, creation itself was divine revelation. The heavens "declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). Mountains, stars, seas—all proclaim their Maker's excellence. Paul later affirms this in Romans 1:20: God's invisible attributes are clearly seen through created things, leaving humanity without excuse for unbelief.

The New Testament quotes or alludes to Psalm 8 multiple times. Jesus references verse 2 when children praise Him in the temple (Matthew 21:16). Hebrews 2:6-9

applies verses 4-6 to Christ's incarnation and exaltation. 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22 cite verse 6 regarding Christ's authority. This Christocentric interpretation reveals Jesus as the true human who fulfills God's original design for humanity's dominion over creation.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. When did you last experience genuine awe at God's glory revealed in creation, and how did it affect your worship?
2. What is the significance of God being both intimately 'our Lord' (covenant relationship) and transcendently glorious (beyond comprehension)?
3. How does recognizing God's 'name' (full character) as excellent throughout all the earth challenge parochial or nationalistic conceptions of God?
4. In what ways does creation's testimony to God's glory make human rejection of Him 'without excuse' (Romans 1:20)?
5. How does Jesus's embodiment of God's glory—both displaying and transcending creation—fulfill and expand Psalm 8's vision?

Interlinear Text

יְהוָה	אֲדֹנָיִינוּ	מָה	אֵדִיר	שֵׁמֶךָ	בְּכָל	הָאֶרֶץ כָּל
O LORD	our Lord	H4100	how excellent	is thy name	H3605	in all the earth
H3068	H113		H117	H8034		H776
אֲשֶׁר	תָּנָה	הַגְּדֹלָה	עַל	הַשָּׁמַיִם:		
H834	who hast set	thy glory	H5921	above the heavens		
	H5414	H1935		H8064		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 8:9 (References Lord): O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Psalms 148:13 (Glory): Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.

Psalms 57:5 (Glory): Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

Exodus 15:11 (Glory): Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

Psalms 145:1 (Parallel theme): I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.

Habakkuk 3:3 (Glory): God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

Hebrews 7:26 (Parallel theme): For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

Isaiah 26:13 (References Lord): O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

Revelation 19:6 (References Lord): And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Psalms 81:1 (Parallel theme): Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.