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# Psalm 8



O self-existent One our sovereign King,  
how expansive is Your Name over all the earth!

This fourth *Sandwich* paper in this series deals with Psalm 8, in which the first and last verses are the same. Here is the Psalm in full.

**To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.**

***1 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!***

*You have set your glory above the heavens.*

*2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.*

*3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;*

*4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

*5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.*

*6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,*

*7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,*

*8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

***9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!***

### **Gittith**

Gittith is a Hebrew word appearing in a phrase that occurs only at the beginning of Psalms 8; 81, and 84, and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Anything "gittite" came from Gath, one of the five main Philistine towns.

Accordingly, the Gittith could be either a musical term such as a tune or method of performance, or the name of a musical instrument. That is, the Gittith could refer to The Gittite Lyre, or the Gittite melody. Since David's personal body-guard of 600 elite soldiers forming the Gittite regiment came from Gath (2 Samuel 15:18-22, 1 Chronicles 18:17), it is possible that these brave soldiers brought instruments and tunes from their homeland. Perhaps the march of the Gittite guard is intended ([Keil and Delitzsch](#)).

As the [JFBB Commentary](#) suggests: Gittith, probably means that the musical performance was directed to be according to a tune of that name; which, derived from Gath, a "wine-press," denotes a a joyous tune used in connection with gathering the vintage. All the Psalms to which this term is prefixed are of such a character. Another view is that "Gittith" refers to Psalms 8, 81, and 84 being composed for the descendants of Obed-edom the Gittite, who was a Levite.

### **The Philistines**

#### **Origin**

The Philistines were a reconstructed form of the Gittites of Gath who were ultimately absorbed by Judah. Gath is also the same as the first part of the word 'Gethsemane'.

In the table of nations (Genesis 10 and 1 Chronicles 1), we learn that in the line of Noah and Ham were Mizraim (Egypt), Casluhim (Egyptian dreamer-astronomers), the Philistines, and the Caphtorim. Jeremiah 47:4 calls the Philistines the remnant of Caphtor from Crete. Refugees from here went south, and from their invasion of Canaan's coast they began to be called Philistines.

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## Meaning

The name Philistine comes from the verb (*palash*), which originally described the digging of burrows in river banks by rodents such as rats, which weakened the shore and hastened its collapse. This is a concern that dominates the debate about refugees to today. In Hebrew, however, this verb came to denote the verbal expression of intense grief brought about by a sudden destruction.

The name Philistine occurs predominantly in reference to Goliath of Gath (1 Samuel 17) and his descendants (2 Samuel 21). The plural Philistines occurs all over the Bible, but in two cases a special plural (Philisticians) is used: 1 Chronicles 14:10 and Amos 9:7.

The Philistines were an immigrant people who lived under five kings in six Canaanite cities or regions: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron and Avva (Joshua 13:3, Judges 3:3). They dominated the region during the reign of Saul (1 Samuel 13:19), and even defeated him on mount Gilboa, killed his sons and drove him to suicide (1 Samuel 31:6).

### Goliath the refugee

The Philistines were subdued and decimated by king David (2 Samuel 8:1), most famously in the valley of Elah where David killed Goliath of Gath, and it should be noted that the name Goliath doesn't mean giant but refugee (1 Samuel 17:51). By the time of Solomon, the Philistine cities had been largely destroyed or annexed by Israel although pockets of Philistine populations appear to have perpetuated until the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:8) ([Abarim Publications](#)).

The ultimate end came for the Philistine culture when they were taken to Babylon, but prior to the exile a substantial Philistine remnant had been absorbed into Jerusalem's population and subsequently survives to this day, namely the Gittites from Gath (2 Samuel 15:18). A related tribe, the Cherethites, who were possibly a rejected class of the Philistines, had even worked their way up into David's military elite (2 Samuel 20:7).

### The Self-existent One

#### *1 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Our English is not very enlightening, for it is O Lord (*Yhwh*), our Lord (*ʾadown*), meaning O self-existing One, our Sovereign, Ruler, our King. These appellations memorialise His individuality.

The Lord did not come into existence, and does not go out of existence. He is independent of all for His existence. David is making a vital point right here, because in the centre of the psalm, in the sandwich filling if you like, he shows that all else, creation and even human rulers depend on Him.

Additionally, David exclaims that His name is majestic in all the earth. Majestic is a beautiful English word, and in Hebrew it is (*ʾaddiyr*) meaning wide, from (*ʾadar*) meaning to expand. When I think of the earth and its width or expanse, I think of the infinite distance between east and west. So, His name is known everywhere, so 'famous', would be an appropriate word too.

As [John Piper](#) has so ably put it, 'majestic' means that there is no place in all the earth where God is not Yahweh—where he is not the absolute one. Everywhere everything depends absolutely on him. He has no viable competitors anywhere. He is above all things everywhere. He sustains all things everywhere. He is the ground and goal of all things everywhere. He is greater and wiser and more beautiful and wonderful than everything everywhere. That's the main point of the psalm. And the aim is that we stand in awe of him and worship.

*You have set your glory above the heavens; or,*

*You whose splendour (grandeur) is celebrated all over the heavens.*



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## The Self-existent One continued

Having gone horizontal about the earth's expansiveness to illustrate the fame of the Lord's name, David now goes vertical and directs our attention to the heavens. The known facts or assumptions about our universe are staggering. According to [Nasa](#), a galaxy is a huge collection of gas, dust, and billions of stars and their solar systems held together by gravity. According to [Livescience.com](#), we can see at most 3% of the universe, and we don't actually know its size. So, the estimate is somewhere between 2 trillion galaxies at the top edge and 100 billion at the lower edge is the number of galaxies in our observable universe. Also, [Space.com](#) suggests that this number is likely to increase as telescope technology in space improves.

As majestic as the night sky appears, its magnitude is astonishing, and its grandeur stunning, and celebrated all over the heavens. The expanse of the earth, and the astounding glory of the heavens are pictorial expressions of the Lord's honorifics as the self-existing One, Sovereign, Ruler, King, over all creation, and indelibly stamp His individuality and uniqueness.

It was David, of course, the writer of Psalm 19 who indicates that the heavens have a story to tell. They are **telling the glory of God** he says, pouring forth their words in the daytime, and declaring their knowledge at night. So effective is their sound that there is no place on earth where their voice is not heard (19:1-4).

### The sandwich filling

#### Frail, feeble babies win

*2 Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings\* you have laid a foundation, or defensive wall of strength because of your foes, to repose the enemy and to take vengeance.*

\*One Hebrew translation has 'tender plants' for the usual 'sucklings'.

On earth, too, the glory of God is being told, this time by infants. There is no clearer contrast between the dependence of babies on their mothers on the one hand, and the independence of the self-existing Sovereign of verse 1. And, the incredible thing is that the self-existing Sovereign chooses to use the mouths of these infants to silence His enemies. What could they be uttering? How might we best understand this? I think by considering the quote that Jesus made from this psalm during the last week before He died. Here's the incident.

*The blind and lame came to him in the temple courts, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the experts in the law saw the wonderful things he did and heard the children crying out in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to him, "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of children and nursing infants you have prepared praise for yourself'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there (Matthew 21:14-17).*

Interestingly, Psalm 8:2 doesn't explain how the babies used their mouths to silence God's enemies. The only other occasion in the Hebrew Bible when the praises of God's people defeated His enemies is described in 2 Chronicles 20:10-22. There the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir came to drive Judah out of their land. When Judah began to shout and praise God, the Lord suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. Moreover, Jesus showed how the babes use their mouths to silence the enemy, namely, by praising God, which is the meaning in psalm 8. Additionally the children of Jerusalem by saying "Hosanna to the Son of David" were directing their praise was to Jesus. In sum, God was being praised by the babes in Psalm 8, and when the children praised Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah, they were praising Him as God.

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## Babies continued

And, the religious leaders were alarmed by that. They were greatly irritated or vexed, and by their protest they wanted Jesus to silence the children. But Jesus says no more and neither do the chief priests and scribes. God's enemies are silenced.

The children are victorious, and God defeated His enemies through the weakness of children. The indignant scribes and teachers are called out as the enemy of God as predicted in psalm 8.

### Frail, feeble man rules

*3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have erected;*

*4 what is man (ʿenosh, frail, feeble, mortal) that you recognise him, the son of adam that you visit him?*

If babies are frail, and feeble, David hastens to remind us that so are mature adult men. Look how he describes them. They are frail, feeble *ʿenosh*, and *adam*, the man from the dirt. Compared with the Almighty Who erected the heavens, man is not worthy of recognition and why should God even pay him a visit? However, David has a counter intuitive answer to his own question, and it lies in the grace of God being the glory of God.

*5 Yet you have **made him** a little lower than God (elohim), and **crowned him** with glory and magnificence.*

There are two opposite things in this verse. Firstly, Adam is made lower, and then he is made higher. He is made lower than God (Elohim) meaning the 'the many powered', the most powerful *God of all* ([Abarim Publications](#)). Secondly, God has made Adam higher, by crowning him with glory and magnificence. Only kings and queens are crowned, and the next verse explains in what sense Adam was king.

*6 You have **given him** dominion over the works of your hands; you have **put all things under his feet**.*

This verse is explanatory of 'crowned with glory and honour. The 'all things' are not absolute, that is, they are not all things without exception but all things by inclusion as defined by verses 7-8. But note first the expression *put all things under his feet*. 'Under his feet' is a hebraism for under his control, and in some cases for victory over enemies, as the following texts reveal.

### Under his feet

The Lord says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies **your footstool**". Rule in the midst of your foes (Psalm 110:1-2). David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord **put them under the soles of his feet** (1Kings 5:3). When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said to the chiefs of the warriors who had gone with him, "Come near, **put your feet on the necks** of these kings." Then Joshua executed them (Joshua 10:24, 26).

These texts from the Hebrew Bible cite victorious warriors putting their enemies under their feet, which is a metaphor for victory over enemies in war. There seems to be a progression in thought here. In Psalm 110, the Davidic king rules in the midst of his foes. Implied, of course, is that the subjugation of his foes was an ongoing process. The 1 Kings 5:3 example indicates that under David, the subjugation of his enemies was complete. The final narrative about Joshua goes further, for the subdued kings were destroyed.

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## Under his feet continued

Moreover, this progressive metaphor is borrowed in the NT three times to illustrate the victory of Christ over His enemies. Here are the texts.

For He must rule as king until he has *put all his enemies under his feet* (1 Corinthians 15:20, 25).

Christ sat down at the right hand of God, and since then has been waiting until his enemies would be made *a footstool for his feet* (Hebrews 10:12-13). "Waiting" is a passive deponent so the subject, Christ Himself, performs the action, instead of receives it.

Both of these texts suggest an ongoing process. 1 Corinthians 15:20, 25 describes a continuously active Christ Who in His current reign subjugates and destroy the enemies of the kingdom. The present tense of 'He must rule as king' is a process occurring from the Ascension until 'the end', that threshold of transition between two progressive realms, between the now and when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father.

However, the following text suggests that the process is final and complete. God raised Christ 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 he has *put all things under his feet* (Ephesians 1:20-22).

### Adam

*6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.*

*7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,*

*8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

So, the 'all things' are prescribed as the land animals, the birds, and the sea creatures. Everything outside of this list is proscribed. So, man was never entrusted with controlling the climate, nor with ruling over one another. Both of these are in God's job description, not ours.

### Summary

*1 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

**Babes:** The weakest & dependent of all human beings on earth are the voices of praise to God silencing His enemies.

**Men:** The strongest, most intelligent and independent of all human beings are God's delegated rulers on planet earth.

*9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

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Psalm 8 is a theological sandwich, enclosed by the first and last verses, which are the same. In them, our Lord is the self-existing, self-sustaining Sovereign, Ruler, and King, independent of all for His existence, famous in all the earth. So, verses 1 and 9 are the most important, and provide an infinite contrast to the 'sandwich filling', that is the other seven verses in between.

In these intervening verses, the full spectrum of humanity is shown to be dependent on the Lord, the independent One. At one extreme, the frail and weak babies, who are dependent for their existence on their mothers, are the voice of God that silences His enemies.

At the other end of the human spectrum, grown and mature men are still *enosh* and *adam*, frail mortal man created from the dust by the self-existing One. Nevertheless, it was to mortal man that the Lord delegated dominion, rule, and sovereignty over earth.

In sum, the self-existing Sovereign embraces in grace His dependent creatures and elevates them, honours them to be His voice and His ruler on earth. What a role!

One final thing. This psalm has a David-Philistine connection according to the superscription. David the author dedicated it to the leader according to the Gittith, which came from Gath, one of the five main Philistine towns. David defeated and silenced the Philistines, and out of Gath came Philistine instruments and tunes employed in singing the praises of God. The parallel to the weak babies praising God and silencing His enemies is too obvious to ignore.

## References

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