


PSALM 138 **GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY**
 A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

Greater Than Expected

Jan. 28, 2024

I. IMPACT

- A. **Lesson:** God’s faithfulness to us His chosen ones is **greater** than we imagine, fulfilling His promises to keep us and bring us through our adversities. He will eventually subdue all things, and thus He is worthy of our thanks and trust.
- B. **Throughout History:** Both Jewish and Christian traditions of scheduled readings have made much use of Psalm 138.
- C. **In Music:** Numerous classical composers have created musical arrangements of the psalm.
- D. **In Theology:** Psalm 138 is important in its instruction about the glories of God’s Word and the Lord’s future subduing and winning of the nations.

II. GENRE: Song of Thanks from the Individual with Prophetic Oracle

- A. It opens much like a typical song of thanks.
 1. The first v. contains David’s pledge to give public thanks.
 2. Pledges like these usually mean that the worshipper will bring a thank offering to the sanctuary.
 3. In this ps David appears to be on the **move**, not in Zion. He speaks of giving thanks to Yahweh “before the gods” (1) and to pray “toward your holy temple” (2). He is pledging not a thank offering *per se* but some other public display of thanks.

PSALM 138 <small>© M. Scott Bashoor 2024</small>			
HEADING Authorship David	PROFESSION OF THANKS: DAVID'S VICTORY OVER PAGAN POWERS vv. 1-3 Pledge to Offer Public Thanks vv. 1-2b Thanks to be Offered on Pagan Turf v. 1 Prayer Directed Toward Zion's Sanctuary v. 2ab Recollection of Deliverance vv. 2c-3 Yahweh's Promise Fulfillment Greater than Expected v. 2c Yahweh's Answer to Prayer Remembered v. 3	ORACLE OF VICTORY: THE NATION'S' EVENTUAL RECOGNITION OF YAHWEH vv. 4-6 Vision of Kings' Acclaiming Yahweh vv. 4-5a Yahweh and His Word to be Gratefully Acknowledged v. 4 Yahweh's Dealings to be Praised in Song v. 5a Recognition of Yahweh's Great Dealings vv. 5b-6 Recognition of Yahweh's Glory v. 5b Recognition of Yahweh's Gracious and Judicious Interactions v. 6	PURPOSE: Celebrating a series of victories over pagan nations, David thanks Yahweh for His covenantal faithfulness. He grows confident that Yahweh will be seen as Lord of the world and that He will continue to preserve David according to His promise. Type: Song of Thanks from the Individual with Prophetic Oracle Author: David Date: After the Ark's Move to Zion (c. 1003 B.C.) Setting: Perhaps during the tours of 2 Sam 8 and 10 Note: Start of the final collection of Davidic pss (Pss 138-145)
CONFESSION OF TRUST: DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN YAHWEH'S FAITHFULNESS vv. 7-8 Prayer of Trust in Yahweh's Deliverance v. 7 Sustaining of His Life v. 7a Overthrow of His Enemies v. 7b Confidence in Yahweh's Preservation v. 8a Concluding Praise and Prayer for Yahweh's Faithfulness v. 8bc			

- B. Some think of Ps 138 as a royal psalm because of its focus on special promises to David. While his unique position as king is at play, the psalm does not focus directly on his kingship.
- C. The middle movement (4-6) contains a prophecy about the world's eventually recognition and acclamation of Yahweh's kingship. It is a striking prophetic **oracle** (divine utterance) in the middle of the song of thanks.

III. SETTING

A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

- 1. David, written after he moved the sanctuary to Zion in 1003 BC. The term "temple" in v. 2 was sometimes used for the Tabernacle (1 Sam 1:9: 3:3).
- 2. Vv. 1-2 describe some tour of **battles** where David had notable victories over pagan powers. The battles recorded in 2 Samuel 8 and 10 could well be the backdrop.

B. PLACEMENT

- 1. Pss 138-145 are the last Davidic psalms in the Psalter. The first and last (138, 145) are songs of thanks while the ones in between are mostly laments.
- 2. Ps 138 is strikingly different than the lament of Ps 137. There defeat by mocking enemies was lamented, but here David speaks of pagan kings & gods acknowledging God's **glory**.
- 3. In Ps 137:5-6 the psalmist promises not to forget Zion, and in Ps 138:2 the psalmist prays toward Zion.
- 4. Ps 138:8b uses a variation of the refrain repeated in Ps 136.

III. COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS

- A. **Future of Present:** The first verse is often translated, "I will give thanks," but it is equally possible to render it as a present tense,

"I am giving thanks." Either way, David describes giving public thanks while in the presence of foreign peoples who were beholden to foreign gods.

B. Before the Gods: The term "gods" of v. 1 is variously understood.

- 1. The term occasionally refers to great human leaders, but this seems unlikely since such are called "kings" in v. 4.
- 2. The term could refer to angelic beings, but this seems to be an odd reference in a song of thanks for deliverance.
- 3. It is a plural of majesty, it would refer to Yahweh Himself, but this creates an odd turn of expression in the verse.
- 4. It seems best to see it as a reference to pagan gods, fictitious beings with power derived psychologically & **demonically**.

C. The Magnified Word: V. 2c reads literally, "You have magnified over all your name your word." This is a difficult phrase to translate, but the sense is that God's **promise** ("word") to David was fulfilled in a way that exceeding Yahweh's reputation ("name"). God did above and beyond what David expected in keeping His promise.

D. God's Purpose for David: In v. 8, David celebrates his confidence in God's promise to fulfill all He had promised to him. If the victories described in v. 3 comes from the time of 2 Sam 8, then the Davidic **covenant** promises of 2 Sam. 7 would have been most fresh in his mind.

E. Chosen Ones: You and I are not David and we do not have the same specific promises made to us as he did. (David had specific promises pronounced on him by Samuel and Nathan.) But the Christian has the great promises of the Gospel pronounced upon him and can be certain that God will do above and beyond what we ask or think.