

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8](#)

(1c) **In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.**

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Because of your kindness and your truth;
for you have made great above all things
your name and your promise.
When I called, you answered me;
you built up strength within me.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

All the kings of the earth shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
when they hear the words of your mouth;
and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD:
“Great is the glory of the LORD.”

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Your right hand saves me.
The LORD will complete what he has done for me;
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

154 Ps 138. A thanksgiving Ps. Structure: 1-3, thanksgiving for deliverance; 4-6, a hymn proclaiming universal recognition of God; 7-8, expression of trust and acknowledgment. **1.** *angels*: Hebr 'ēlōhîm, “God” or “gods.” It could stand for the members of the heavenly court or “angels,” or there may be an allusion to Yahweh as incomparable among the gods (Ps 86:8; Ex 15:11). **2.** *temple*: Here the thanksgiving liturgy takes place. **3.** A summary statement of the saving act. **4-6.** This idealistic and enthusiastic universalism is characteristic also of other Pss (22:28-30; 47:2; and the enthronement Pss).

1

Hebr Hebrew

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Douay-Rheims Bible

Confitebor tibi. Thanksgiving to God for his benefits.

1 I will praise thee, O lord, with my whole heart: for thou hast heard the words of my mouth. I will sing praise to thee in the sight of his angels: 2 I will worship towards thy holy temple, and I will give glory to thy name. For thy mercy, and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy holy name above all. 3 In what day soever I shall call upon thee, hear me: thou shalt multiply strength in my soul. 4 May all the kings of the earth give glory to thee: for they have heard all the words of thy mouth. 5 And let them sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the Lord.

6 For the Lord is high, and looketh on the low: and the high he knoweth afar off. 7 If I shall walk in the midst of tribulation, thou wilt quicken me: and thou hast stretched forth thy hand against the wrath of my enemies: and thy right hand hath saved me. 8 The Lord will repay for me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: O despise not the work of thy hands.

PSALM CXXXVII. (CONFITEBOR TIBI.)

Thanksgiving to God, for his benefits.

Ver. 1. David. It contains a form of thanksgiving for him, or for any other. (Worthington) (Berthier) --- Some Greek copies add, "of Aggeus and Zacharias." But this is of small authority, though they might sing this psalm (Calmet) when the Jews had been delivered from all their enemies, (Origen) under Darius, who married Esther. It might also be used by Ezechias, after his recovery, (Calmet) or by David, when he found himself at rest, (Muis) and had the Messias in view. (Berthier) --- *Praise.* Literally, "confess," (Haydock) by repentance, (St. Jerome) and praise. (St. Hilary) --- *For, &c.* This sentence is placed after *angels*, in Septuagint and is not at all in Hebrew, (Berthier) Chaldean, Syriac, &c. (Calmet) --- It seems probable that the Septuagint found this reason for praise in their copies. --- *Angels.* Some would translate "judges, gods," &c. But the psalmist would rather pray before the *angels*, who would attend in the temple, and present his petitions. (Berthier) (Apocalypse v., and viii.) (Apostolic Constitutions viii. 4.) --- Their presence ought to fill us with awe, (Luke xii. 8., and 1 Timothy v. 21.) and with confidence, if our prayer comes from *the heart*. (Haydock) --- Such God will hear, and the angels will present, Tobias xii., Acts x., and 1 Corinthians xi. 10., and Psalm xxiv. 10.

Ver. 2. Towards. Thus the Jews acted, when they were at a distance from the temple, and in captivity. (Worthington) --- *Truth.* Which thou hast displayed in my regard. --- *Holy.* Septuagint may have perhaps written *Greek: Logion*, "Word," agreeably to the Hebrew, though our version seems more easy. (Berthier) --- St. Jerome (ad Sun.) explains it of Jesus Christ, the *Word*, whose name is so exalted, (Philippians ii. 9.;

Calmet) as well as the divine majesty. (Worthington) --- The holy doctor translates, "thou hast magnified thy word above every name." But *thy* is joined with *name* in Hebrew. Others would supply, "thy name *and* thy word." (Berthier) --- *Strength*. Septuagint, &c., add, "thy." (Calmet) --- All virtue comes from God. (Haydock) --- If my prayer be granted, as formerly, I shall advance in virtue. (St. Chrysostom) (Ephesians iii. 14.)

Ver. 4. Mouth. All kingdoms shall sooner or later, become acquainted with the gospel. (Worthington) --- The predictions of Jeremias, &c., had been communicated to the neighbouring princes, (Calmet) and all might know that God had executed his threats and promises. (Haydock) --- Yet none of them embraced the true religion, even after the captivity, so that this relates to Christ. (Berthier)

Ver. 5. Ways. Of Providence, (Calmet) and mercy, &c., Psalm xxiv. 10. (Berthier) --- Some have read, "canticles," *Greek: odais*, being substituted for *Greek: odois*. (Haydock)

Ver. 6. The high, &c. The proud and haughty, who exalt themselves, God *knoweth afar off*; that is, he despiseth the, and setteth them at a distance from him; whilst he stoopeth down to favour and embrace the low and humble. (Challoner) --- He treats the proud as strangers to him. (Worthington) --- If kings would sing in the ways of the Lord, they also must love, and be humble. (St. Augustine) --- God knows all things before they happen, (St. Chrysostom) and both high and low are equally open to his eye, Psalm cxii. 5., and cxxxviii. 2., and 8. (Calmet)

Ver. 7. Wilt quicken me. And not otherwise. (St. Augustine) --- There is no going to heaven without crosses. (Haydock) --- *Wrath*. Most furious and cruel enemies. (Calmet)

Ver. 8. Repay. Taking me under his protection, (St. Chrysostom) he will punish my oppressors; or he has done it already. (Calmet) --- *Hands*. Rescue me from the oppression of my temporal and spiritual enemies. (Berthier)

Word Biblical Commentary (non-Catholic)

God's Hand in My Life (138:1–8)

Bibliography

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A. “A Consideration of Some Alleged Meanings of עַד in Hebrew.” *JSS* 15 (1970) 145–80. ———. “A Further Consideration of D. W. Thomas’s Theories about *yada*.” *VT* 41 (1991) 145–63. **Johnstone, W.** “*YD*. II, ‘Be Humbled, Humiliated’?” *VT* 41 (1991) 49–62. **Thomas, D. W.** “The Root עַד in Hebrew. 2.” *JTS* 36 (1935) 409–12. ———. “Some Rabbinic Evidence for a Hebrew Root עַד = [Arabic] *wd*.” *JQR* n.s. 37 (1946–47) 177–78.

Translation

- ¹ Davidic.
I give thanks^a *with all my heart;*^b (3+3)
before the gods^c *I celebrate you with music.*
- ² *I prostrate myself toward your holy temple* (3+2+2)

JSS Journal of Semitic Studies

VT Vetus Testamentum

JTS Journal of Theological Studies

JQR Jewish Quarterly Review

n. note

a 1.a. Heb. MSS, including 11QPs^a, and the ancient versions add the divine name, which is expected as a voc. to which the second person may refer. Modern versions so add, except NJPS. However, Dahood’s stylistic objection (276) that it upsets the precise chiasm of the bicolon is noteworthy. MT’s shorter text is to be preferred as the harder reading.

b 1.b. LXX’s addition, ὅτι ἤκουσας τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ στόματός μου, “because you have heard the words of my mouth,” was hailed as part of the original Hebrew text by Crüsemann (*Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 249; also NJB) on the ground that it improves the metrical sequence of vv 1–2, allowing two bicola of 3 + 3 and two of 2 + 2. But it is suspiciously like v 4b, and Anderson (901) was more likely to be correct in deriving the addition from v 4b. Most probably it was originally a marginal correction of the Greek of v 4b, dispensing with the extra πάντα, “all”; it was wrongly attached to v 1 because of the similarity of the verbs of thanksgiving in vv 1a, 4a, and the 3 pl. verb and 2 sg. suf. were adapted to suit the new context.

c 1.c. LXX characteristically weakened אלהים to ἀγγέλων, “angels” (thus NJB renders); Syr. *mlk*’, “kings,” is probably a corruption of *mlk*’, “angels,” under the influence of Ps 119:46 and also of v 4 (A. Vogel, *Bib* 32 [1951] 53, 202). Tg. דיניא, “judges,” is an exegetical rendering in accordance with its understanding of Ps 82 (Kraus [1989] 507).

and give thanks to your name
for your loyal love and your faithfulness
because you have made your name and promise (2+2)
to surpass all else.^a

³ At the time I called, you answered me (3+3)
and made me exultant,^a putting strength within me.

⁴ Let all the kings in the world give you thanks, Yahweh, (4+3)
when they have heard the promises of your mouth,

⁵ and let them sing of Yahweh's ways, (3+3)
that Yahweh's glory is so great.

⁶ For, high as Yahweh is, he looks upon the lowly, (4+3)

a 2.a. MT reads rather clumsily הגדלת על-כל-שמך אמרתך, “you have made your promise great above all your name”; i.e., apparently, by fulfilling the promise Yahweh has surpassed all earlier self-revelation. Various attempts have been made to improve the text, none of which has a ring of certainty. The simplest is to read abs. כל for const. כל- and to insert ו, “and,” before the final noun (Schmidt, 243; NRSV and the *Translation*); similarly Dahood (277), who, however, took על-כל as “before all,” corresponding to “before the gods” in v 1, and understood the copula (cf. NIV, NJPS). Kraus ([1989] 506), followed by Crüsemann (*Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 249), inserted the copula and also assumed loss by haplogr. of השמים, “the heavens,” before שמך, “your name,” arguing that v 2b is otherwise too short: “you have made great above all the heavens. . . .” REB (“you have exalted your promise above the heavens”) reads שָׁמַיִם (י)־ךָ, “your heavens,” in place of שמך, “your name” (cf. Brockington, *Hebrew Text*, 153). The text is sometimes shortened by deletion of שמך, “your name,” as an intrusion from v 2aβ (e.g., BHS).

a 3.a. For תרהבנו, cf. רפהב, “pride,” and Tg. Aram. רהב, “be proud, arrogant.” LXX

πολυωρήσεις με, “you will esteem me highly,” need not represent פתר־בני, “you will make me great,” which is read by Kraus ([1989] 506), NRSV, NJB: cf. postbiblical Heb. הרהיב, “declare great”;

רפהב, “pride, greatness” (Jastrow, 1453b). The final two words of the line appear to function as a

circumstantial clause. For the association of עז, “strength,” with the root רהב, “be proud,” cf. גאון

עז, “pride of strength,” Ezek 24:21; 30:6, 18; 33:28. Cf. NIV (and the similar NEB) “you made me bold and stout-hearted.”

but from afar he takes cognizance^a of the proud.

- ⁷ Whenever I walk amid trouble, (3+3)
you grant me life in the face of my enemies' fury.
You stretch out your hand, (2+2)
and you save me with your right hand.^a
- ⁸ Yahweh acts as avenger^a on my behalf. (3+3+3)
Yahweh, your loyal love is everlasting:
do not abandon the product^b of your hands.

a 6.a. D. W. Thomas (*JTS* 36 [1935] 409–10; *JQR* n.s. 37 [1946–47] 177) proposed a pointing as **יִדְעַ**, “he humbles,” linking with Arab. *waduʿa*, “become still,” and claiming that the verb of v 6a, which implies looking kindly, requires an antithetical reference to punishment. NEB (“he humbles”) concurred, reading a pausal **יִדְבַע** (Brockington, *Hebrew Text*, 153), though significantly REB (“he takes note of”) has not. J. A. Emerton (*JSS* 15 [1970] 171, 177) defended Thomas’s derivation both in principle and in this instance, but later, after W. Johnstone undermined the Arabic basis of Thomas’s view (*VT* 41 [1991] 49–62), Emerton found no difficulty in accepting the sense “know” here (*VT* 41 [1991] 161). As I maintained in the first edition, the traditional meaning “know” is hardly inappropriate here. Grammatically the form in MT is generally taken as a variant of **יִדְעַ** (*GKC* § 69b n. 1, 69p). Dahood (279–80), following Gunkel (582) and followed by NJPS, took the cola as synonymous: in the second **גִּבּוֹר**, “the lofty, proud,” continues **רָם**, “high,” in v 6a, and **יִדְעַ** is used in a positive sense, “care for”: “and though the Lofty, he heeds. . . .” Although this interpretation is syntactically possible, the usual understanding is supported by the parallelism of Isa 10:33b. See *Comment*.

a 7.a. Rather than “and your right hand delivers me” (NRSV for **וְתוֹשִׁיעֵנִי יְמִינְךָ**; cf. RNAB). The flow of the text suggests a double subj. (see *GKC* §144 l, m; Joüon §151c; cf. Ps 108:2, 7).

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Notes

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Heb. Hebrew

MSS manuscript(s)

voc vocative

njps New Jewish Publication Society Translation

MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in *BHS*)

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

njb New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

pl. plural

sg singular or under

Syr. Syriac

119:46 and also of v 4 (A. Vogel, *Bib* 32 [1951] 53, 202). Tg. דיניא, “judges,” is an exegetical rendering in accordance with its understanding of Ps 82 (Kraus [1989] 507).

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Bib *Biblica*

Tg. Targum

const construct

nrsv New Revised Standard Version (1989)

niv The New International Version (1978)

haplogr haplography

reb Revised English Bible

BHS Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia, ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977)

neb The New English Bible

claiming that the verb of v 6a, which implies looking kindly, requires an antithetical reference to punishment. NEB (“he humbles”) concurred, reading a pausal יִדַּע (Brockington, *Hebrew Text*, 153), though significantly REB (“he takes note of”) has not. J. A. Emerton (*JSS* 15 [1970] 171, 177) defended Thomas’s derivation both in principle and in this instance, but later, after W. Johnstone undermined the Arabic basis of Thomas’s view (*VT* 41 [1991] 49–62), Emerton found no difficulty in accepting the sense “know” here (*VT* 41 [1991] 161). As I maintained in the first edition, the traditional meaning “know” is hardly inappropriate here. Grammatically the form in MT is generally taken as a variant of יִדַּע (GKC § 69b n. 1, 69p). Dahood (279–80), following Gunkel (582) and followed by NJPS, took the cola as synonymous: in the second גבה, “the lofty, proud,” continues רם, “high,” in v 6a, and יידע is used in a positive sense, “care for”: “and though the Lofty, he heeds. . . .” Although this interpretation is syntactically possible, the usual understanding is supported by the parallelism of Isa 10:33b. See *Comment*.

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8.a. A transitive force has traditionally been assigned to גמר, “come to an end,” here and in Ps 57:3, and most modern versions follow suit; in both cases the difficult ellipse of an obj. “what he has begun, his purpose” has then to be assumed. A meaning “wreak vengeance,” which fits both contexts, is attested both by Ugar. *gmr* and by LXX ἀνταποδώσει, “will requite,” Tg. ישלם בישא, “will repay evil,” and in Ps 57:3 *ultorem*, “avenger” (cf. Dahood, *TS* 14 [1953] 596–97; Gibson, *Canaanite Myths*, 144; HALOT, 197b–98a; and NJPS “will settle accounts for me”). For the semantic development, Dahood compared that of the root שלם from “be complete” to “requite.”

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Form/Structure/Setting

GKC *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* ed. E. Kautsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (London/New York: OUP, 1910; repr. 1966)

subj subject/subjective

Canaanite Myths J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*

HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Eng. tr. of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*

This individual thanksgiving song uses a number of the elements of its genre (cf. Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction*, 199–221; Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 249–51). An introductory declaration of thanksgiving (vv 1–2), in this case expanded theologically, is followed by a summary account of Yahweh’s answer to the psalmist’s prayer and deliverance (v 3). Vv 4–6 are a hymn summoning kings to join in praising Yahweh’s greatness; one may compare the imperatival call for the world to praise in the processional hymn for the thank-offering service, Ps 100:1–2, and in Ps 66:1–4, and the universal jussive calls of Ps 22:28 (27) (REB, NJPS). Here there is rather unusual oscillation between address of Yahweh and third-person reference. Oscillation in divine references is a standard feature of thanksgiving songs (cf. Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 225), but in the call to praise, third-person references are expected, as in vv 5–6. The direct address of v 4 carries over from vv 1–3. Theoretically it is possible to take the verbs of vv 4a, 5a as imperfect and so future forms, as in NRSV, NJPS, and RNAB. Ps 86:9 might be cited in support, but there the future hope is a direct and logical development of the statement regarding Yahweh’s uniqueness in v 8 (cf. Ps 102:16 [15] after v 13 [12]). In this case a jussive summons fits the psalm’s genre. Vv 7–8a constitute an affirmation of confidence in which the psalmist speaks of Yahweh’s aid to him in general terms. Such avowals are more characteristic of the individual lament, but parallels in thanksgiving songs may be found in Pss 18:29–30 (28–29); 118:6–7, 14a. The passage uses prayer language apart from a third-person reference in v 8aα, which takes the form of testimony. It issues into a theological affirmation (cf. Ps 18:31 [30]), which is associated with the formula of praise used at the thanksgiving service according to Jer 33:11. The psalm closes with a petition, which accords well with the form of direct address that the psalm has mainly used. It is not common in the thanksgiving song, but there are parallels at Pss 40:12 (11); 118:25 (cf. 33:22).

Westermann (*Praise*, 111, 117, 122, 129) drew attention to a number of elements. In v 2 occurs the term *τὸν*, “loyal love,” which is characteristic of the thanksgiving song with reference to God’s deliverance in time of need (cf. Pss 18:51 [50]; 66:20; 92:3 [2]; 116:5; 118:1). The summarizing statement of praise in v 6 contrasting exaltation and humbling is a counterpart of the double wish in the lament and has parallels in Pss 18:28 (27); 107:39–41. V 8aβ illustrates a feature of this type of psalm, a statement about the totality of God’s actions placed at the end (cf. Pss 34:23 [22]; 92:15). The motif of preservation in v 8b, used to supplement the overall theme of deliverance, is rare; Westermann compared Pss 107:9 and 33:22.

The setting of the psalm is clearly the forecourt of the temple, in view of v 2. Crüsemann (*Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 251), following Gunkel (583; id. and Begrich, *Introduction*, 209–10), regarded the psalm not as sung to accompany a thank offering, which the psalm does not mention, but as a “spiritualized” form unaccompanied by sacrifice but sung still in the temple precincts. He pointed to the degeneration in style whereby prayerful statements and testimony, properly distinct in the basic form, are jumbled together and considered it evidence for loss of the original full setting. This presumed development is rather speculative.

The psalm has been interpreted as a royal song of thanksgiving, notably by Mowinckel (*Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:29, 32), Dahood (276), Eaton (*Kingship*, 63), and Croft (*Identity of the Individual*, 38, 131). Parallels with other royal psalms, especially with Ps 18, and the reference to kings in v 4 are cited in support. Such an ascription would clearly suit the Davidic heading to the psalm, if it was originally sung by a Davidic king. Gunkel (584), followed by Kraus ([1989] 506), objected that a king would pray inside the temple (cf. 2 Sam 12:20; 2 Kgs 19:14) rather than in the forecourt (v 2). Eaton reasonably countered this objection by observing that thanksgiving songs would be likely to take place in the court by the great altar on which the accompanying sacrifices were offered. He preferred this setting to that of Dahood (277), who envisioned the king absent from Jerusalem on a military campaign and directing his prayer in the direction of the temple. Against Weiser's contention (798) that v 6a implies that the speaker was a simple member of the faith community, it has been argued that humility before God was a royal ideal (Dahood, 279, comparing עַבְד, "servant," in Ps 89:40, 51 [39, 50]; Eaton, *Kingship*, 180). But v 6 does read more like a general statement relating to classes of people. Overall there does not seem to be evidence compelling enough to categorize the psalm as royal with any certainty. The royal associations of vv 4–5 may be adequately explained by the democratizing process whereby members of the community took over expressions properly and originally spoken by a king (Gunkel, 583; Kraus [1989] 508). Then the heading may attest the psalm's subsequent attachment to an existing Davidic collection or may have a homiletical purpose. In this connection it is of interest to note that the Lucianic text of LXX adds to the heading Ζαχαρίου, "of Zechariah," an ascription related to vv 4–5: "The theme of universal recognition of God's grandeur and glory is an important part of Haggai's and Zechariah's prophecies" (Slomovic, *ZAW* 91 [1979] 362).

Kirkpatrick (783), Anderson (901), and others (cf. the list in Gunkel, 583), more recently Mays (424–25), have regarded the psalm as a communal thanksgiving song in which a solo voice represents the community in returning thanks for the Babylonian exile. Kirkpatrick found allusions to the exile and return in very many psalms where other scholars have failed to detect them. He pointed to parallels with Isa 40–66 and Ps 102:16–23 (15–22); in this instance Kraus ([1989] 506–8) concurred in the former case, if only to the extent of postulating a postexilic dating for the psalm on their basis. Kirkpatrick compared v 5 with Isa 40:5; 60:1, and v 6 with Isa 57:15; 66:2. Kraus saw the influence of Second Isaiah in v 1b and traced a parallel with the concept of Israel's role as witness to the nations' gods concerning Yahweh's saving work in Isa 43:10; 44:8. However, the parallels adduced do not appear to be distinctive enough to carry conviction. Similarities may be adequately explained as due to common cultic traditions. Certainly they do not necessitate a communal interpretation for the psalm, and the lone plural in MT at v 8 can hardly bear such weight. In any case Kirkpatrick's strongly eschatological interpretation of the psalm that underlies his references to Isa 40–66 and Ps 102 is unlikely on form-critical grounds. The date of the psalm may be left an open question (cf. Rogerson and McKay, 153). Crüsemann's observations concerning form-

critical breakdown may be relevant, but it is difficult to tie such changes to precise chronology.

The psalm divides into three strophes, vv 1–3, 4–6, 7–8 (Dahood, 276). The central strophe is bound together as a unit by the fourfold mention of the divine name, held back until now and savored with pride, and the threefold occurrence of כי, “when, that, for.” Around it cluster the other two strophes, linked by the motif of deliverance from distress (vv 3, 7). חסדך, “your loyal love,” functions as a framing and parallel element (vv 2, 8), while the repetition of שמך, “your name,” in v 2 corresponds to that of יד(י), “your hand(s),” in vv 7–8. The second strophe takes up a number of terms used in the first, transferring them to a wider setting: כל, “all,” vv 1, 2, 4; ואודה/אודה, “(and) I give thanks,” vv 1–2, corresponding to יודך, “they will give you thanks,” v 4; הגדלת, “you made great,” v 2, corresponding to גדול, “great,” v 5; and אמרך, “your saying,” v 2, corresponding to פירי פיך, “promises of your mouth,” v 4.

Here is a survey of the psalm:

138:1–3	Thanksgiving
138:4–6	Yahweh’s great praiseworthiness
138:7–8	Recurring deliverance

Comment

Thanksgiving (138:1–3). In the temple forecourt a worshiper utters his song of thanksgiving. His face is turned toward the main building, the place of Yahweh’s gracious presence (cf. 1 Kgs 8:29). He sings with enthusiasm: his personal experience constitutes for him proof positive of the reality and power of Israel’s God and so a defiant challenge to all rival claims of deity. In tones of praise he theologizes from his experience. He has seen at work in his own life Yahweh’s national attributes of covenant love and faithfulness (cf. Exod 34:6). It has been his privilege to witness the supreme validity of God’s self-revelation and promises. Then in simpler vein the psalmist gives the reason for his thanksgiving: answered prayer and restored vitality and morale.

In v 1 the whole heart represents the conscious devotion of the will (Wolff, *Anthropology*, 53; cf. Pss 9:2 [1]; 86:12; 111:1). Gunkel (583) compared with נגד אליהם, “before the gods,” the phrase בגוים, “among the nations,” and the like in Pss 18:50 (49); 57:10 (9); 96:3. Here the thanksgiving is an implicit testimony to Yahweh’s power not only over surrounding pagan nations but over their gods. Their apparent rivalry is dealt a blow by the manifestation of Yahweh’s might. Less likely was H. Bardtke’s explanation (“Die hebräische Präposition,” 22) in general terms of a confrontation with the divine and the holy within the temple precincts.

Yahweh’s great praiseworthiness (138:4–6). So overwhelming is the psalmist’s sense of wonder and indebtedness that he transfers his thanksgiving theme to a broader canvas. He is painfully aware of the inadequacy of his little contribution of

praise to so great a God. Surely nothing but the concerted thanksgiving of the monarchs of earth could approach the praiseworthiness of this unique God (cf. v 1) whose habit it is both to promise and to perform, manifesting transcendent power. The wonder is that such heavenly majesty is allied with grace. The psalmist's own experience enables him to deduce a general principle of divine magnanimity. It has illustrated afresh a polarity in God's dealings (cf. Luke 14:11; 18:14), a kindly concern for those who subordinate themselves to him (cf. 1 Pet 5:6) but ill-boding omniscience of the behavior of the self-willed (cf. vv 7, 8).

J. T. Willis ("Alternating [ABA'B'] Parallelism," 60, 73) has commented on the alternating parallelism used in vv 4–5 to emphasize human praise of God's revelation. For the thought of v 6b, one may compare Ps 73:11; Job 22:13, where presumed divine lack of knowledge is associated with the impunity of the wicked, and Job 11:11; 34:25, where divine knowledge has a sinister connotation.

Recurring deliverance (138:7–8). The singer is not content to allow his generalizing to stay on the level of theological truths concerning God's ways with humanity. He adapts it to express his intensely personal appreciation. Yahweh is praised as one whose wont it is to deliver him from affliction and to restore him to fullness of life. Such protection and vindication are a pattern he has experienced time and time again. For the positive sense of God's outstretched hand, one may compare Prov 31:20.

The psalmist is personally qualified to sing the motto of the thanksgiving service (Jer 33:11) concerning the constancy of divine grace. Yet he dare not take it for granted: it must ever be balanced by constant submission. So his final word is a prayer that, just as he has known God's molding hand upon his life thus far, he may continue to encounter God's gracious presence (cf. Job 10:3, 8–12; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 4:19).

Explanation

Spirituality, the meeting point of theology and human life, is very evident in this psalm. First, there is an interpretation of human experience in terms of divine providence. The speaker interprets the resolution of crisis in his life as divinely engineered, encouraged to do so because it followed a prayer for deliverance (v 3). Second, traditional theology is actualized in the experience of deliverance. The great God of Israel, whose attributes are "loyal love and faithfulness"—or the "grace and truth" of John 1:17—has intervened and brought those very attributes to light in the life of this individual believer. Moreover, Yahweh's watchful providence at work in the human world (v 6) has found illustration. Third, he applies to his own experience the grand hymnic claim that Yahweh's loyal love is everlasting. Surveying his own life, he sees a pattern of such delivering love in past experience and ventures to ask that his caring creator may continue to manifest it in the uncertainties that lie in his future.

There is no hint of presumption in the appropriation of such theological truths. Rather, there is a strong sense of divine transcendence (vv 5–6). Yahweh is superior not only to the greatest on earth but also to those whom other nations regard as

greatest in heaven (vv 1, 4). Yet the psalmist has resolved to his own satisfaction the theological paradox of God's transcendence and immanence.

2

²Allen, L. C. 2002. *Vol. 21: Word Biblical Commentary : Psalms 101-150 (Revised)*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas