

## ***Psalm 8: What Is Israel's King that You Remember Him?***<sup>1</sup>

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Walter Brueggemann represents the majority opinion when he identifies Psalm 8 as a "song of creation" that gives "articulation to creation faith."<sup>2</sup> Read in connection with the creation story, the psalm bears witness to the dignity and worth that *all* humans have despite the Fall. Accordingly, the "man" and the "son of man" in v. 4<sup>3</sup> are usually interpreted "in an entirely democratic fashion"<sup>4</sup> to refer to humanity in general.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the New Testament understands Jesus to be the "fulfillment" of the psalm does not diminish its general application to the dominion that all humans exercise over creation.<sup>6</sup>

All this is so obvious that it needs little exegetical defense, and, despite what I say below, I admit that the "democratic" interpretation is a legitimate way of reading this psalm.<sup>7</sup> But I am no longer

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<sup>1</sup> A revised version of a chapel address given at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, March 2, 2001, and the Reformed College of Ministries, Brisbane, September 5, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 28, 36. See also Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:109, who identifies the psalm as a "hymn of creation praise."

<sup>3</sup> Verse 5 in the Masoretic (i.e., Hebrew) Text – because the superscript is verse 1. References to verse numbers will follow the English translations.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur 13; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 243.

<sup>5</sup> A recent example is James L. Mays, "What is a Human Being? Reflections on Psalm 8," *Theology Today* 50 (1994): 511-20. This interpretation finds explicit expression in recent translations like the *New Revised Standard Version* ("what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?") and the *New Living Translation* ("what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us?").

<sup>6</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 110.

<sup>7</sup> To anticipate my conclusion, if Jesus Christ is ultimately the one true human, then all humans (apart from him) must be less than fully human. This less-than-true humanity may be analyzed from two perspectives. On one hand, it can be viewed, negatively, as a tendency towards a bestial identity (which is the perspective I adopt here). On the other hand, we can define humanity from the perspective of Paul's statement that "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). This means that sinful humans now lack the glory that was once theirs as bearers of the divine image (see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 226). From this perspective, humanity is still human, albeit in a "falling short" and "lacking glory" manner. So the generic-democratic interpretation of Psalm 8 is legitimate provided we recognize the limited truth that it expresses.

convinced that it provides the only way, or even the *best* way of reading it, whether in its original context or in light of the New Testament's reinterpretation.<sup>8</sup>

To some degree, my reservations about the "democratic" interpretation grow out of a sense of dissonance. If this psalm – in its original setting – speaks about humanity in general, then it espouses a remarkably high view of the Gentiles. To say that, "You made humanity a little lower than God (or, the gods),<sup>9</sup> crowned with glory and honor" makes the Gentiles – rebellious, idolatrous Gentiles – as well as Israel, a shade short of divine. Possibly. While this sounds quite acceptable to my post-Enlightenment ears, an Israelite whose Torah divided the human race into clean (Israelites) and unclean (Gentiles) might have thought otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

More significantly, I do not think that the "democratic" interpretation does justice to the close connection that exists between the story of Adam and Eve and *Israel's* story. While it is true that

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<sup>8</sup> Implicit in this statement is my conviction that biblical texts should be read (by and large) in the context of the unfolding story of redemption. The meaning of a text varies depending on the way it is related to the larger story in which it is embedded. Each part of the unfolding story (including individual psalms) "make sense" on their own as the story unfolds; they have provisional meanings, which are discerned through grammatical-historical exegesis. But these earlier parts of the story will "make sense" *in a different way* once the climax of the story is known. The meaning of the parts is shaped by the whole, which, in an unfolding story, means that the parts only "make *ultimate* sense" in the light of the climax of the story. Now I admit that the Bible is not quite an unfolding story, but it is a book that takes its general shape from the history to which it bears witness. This connection to the metanarrative of redemption means there are (at least) two ways of reading Old Testament texts. The "first reading" can be variously named: reading towards an unknown conclusion, reading without the benefit of the conclusion, reading a text in the context of the story as far as it has unfolded. It is like the way we read a novel or watch a movie for the first time: we make sense of the individual parts in the context of what we have read or seen so far. But there is also a *second way of reading* Old Testament texts, one that is distinctly Christian. It is fundamentally an act of rereading, or reinterpretation of earlier provisional meanings, in the light of the (sometimes surprising) Christ-ending to the story of redemption. Just as scenes from a movie watched or book read a second time can have quite different meanings once the ending is known, the same is true for Old Testament passages re-read in terms of the whole canonical story of redemption.

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew אֱלֹהִים, *'elohîm*, can be translated as either "God" or "gods," i.e., gods who are not God, or what are elsewhere referred to in the Old Testament as "angels." The Septuagint appears to adopt the latter interpretation and translates the Hebrew with a plural form of ἄγγελος, *angelos*. We may leave the matter open by saying that this verse defines the "man" of v. 4 as a little less than divine. For the purposes of this discussion it is not necessary to decide whether the divinity of God himself or the "lower" divinity of the lesser gods (i.e., the angels) is in view.

<sup>10</sup> Another way of raising this question might be to reflect on how Psalm 8 would have been used in Israel's worship. VanGemeren, "Psalms," 109, admits that the answer to this question is not clear.

Genesis 1-3 introduces us to the story of all humans, especially in their fallen condition, these chapters also anticipate and parallel the story of Israel and her kings.<sup>11</sup>

We can develop this thought along the following lines. In Genesis 1-3, the Hebrew word אָדָם ('*adam*') is defined first collectively (Gen 1:26, 27: "let us make *humanity* in our image") and then individually and representatively (Gen 2:7: "Yahweh God formed *the* [individual] *human* from the dust of the ground:" Gen 2:7). Yahweh's goal for humanity and its single representative (Adam) is that they be his vicegerents, ruling the world on his behalf.<sup>12</sup> But this story is a background for the real focus of the Old Testament: *Israel's* role as the replacement for the First Humanity of Genesis 1, and David's role as the replacement for the First Human (Adam) described in Genesis 2 and 3. Israel's history therefore is the story of the New Humanity, the people destined to become what the fallen humanity of Genesis 1 failed to become. Likewise, the history of David and his descendants is the story of the New Human, the representation and quintessence of Israel, who would one day become all that fallen Adam had failed to become. The purpose of the Old Testament's "Primal Man" stories (in Genesis 1-3 and elsewhere) is to help Israel understand and define its role and the role of its kings in redemptive history, namely, to act as God's obedient vicegerents who would rule the world on his behalf. For me, the Old Testament's "Adam theology" is inseparable from its theology of Israel and of David.<sup>13</sup> This means that in Israelite royal ideology, especially as it finds expression in the Psalter, the Davidic king was thought to be a second Adam, Adam reborn, as it were.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In different ways, this point has been recently made by John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 81-111, and Martin Emmrich, "The Temptation Narrative of Genesis 3:1-6: A Prelude to the Pentateuch and the History of Israel," *Evangelical Quarterly* 73 (2001): 3-20. At a most basic level we should see the parallels between the two stories: disobeying Torah (in the case of Adam and Eve, it is a one-law Torah) leads to loss of "Life" (i.e., exile from the land of blessing). See, for example, Deut 30:15-19.

<sup>12</sup> See Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 3.

<sup>13</sup> This analysis is largely dependent on N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 20-23.

<sup>14</sup> See Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (Lutterworth Studies in Church and Bible: London: Lutterworth, 1955), 39-47, and Nicolas Wyatt, "'Supposing Him to Be the Gardener' (John 20, 15): A Study of the Paradise Motif in John," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 81 (1990): 32-34. Note, for example, Pss 2:7 and 89:25 (MT 26) which depict Israel's king as the human son of God. The roots of this understanding of Davidic kingship seem to lie in Gen 1:26-27 (the bearer of the divine image as world ruler) and 5:3 (where image-bearing linked to sonship). As McCartney, "Ecce Homo," 3, says, "Man as image means man as son, and the son of God is a king." This Adamic language is then applied to Israel's kings.

This link between Adam and David invites a different approach to the Adam language of Psalm 8. When the psalmist asks, "What is man (אִנוֹשׁ, 'enosh<sup>15</sup>) that you are mindful of him (or, "remember him"), the son of man (בֶּן-אָדָם, ben-'adam<sup>16</sup>) that you care for him?" he is not referring to humanity in general – at least not primarily – but to Israel's king, David, the New Human, who was the individualization and representation of all that the New Humanity, Israel, was meant to be. Read from this perspective, I would define Psalm 8 as a royal psalm<sup>17</sup> – like Psalms 2 and 110 – and therefore also a song of *re-creation*.

This leads to three observations on the text. First, it invites a much more pregnant interpretation of the psalm's superscript. The Hebrew לְדָוִד, *ledavid*, is polyvalent. It can mean "belonging to David," that is, written by David. But it can also mean "for David (to recite)" or even "about David." All three of these translations "work," but against the kind of background I have been painting, I read this as a psalm "about David." Yes, the ambiguous David of Samuel and Kings, but more so "David" as an *ideal* and *eschatological* figure (like the David of Chronicles!). A Davidic king who exists partially and typologically in the historical David, but fully in an ideal and yet future king, an eschatological David, the final true Human.<sup>18</sup>

Second, in Israelite royal ideology, the "godlikeness" of original humanity ("let us make humanity in our image") is especially restored in the Davidic king. For example, in Ps 45:6 the king is addressed as "god" ("Your throne, O *god*, will last for ever and ever").<sup>19</sup> In other words, the king was so close to being divine – so much the bearer of the divine image – that he could even be

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<sup>15</sup> Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, 251, raises the intriguing possibility that אִנוֹשׁ, 'enosh, is used here to create another echo of the primeval history by evoking the name of Adam's grandson, Enosh, during whose life "men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26).

<sup>16</sup> Arguably, in the Adamic context this might be translated "son of Adam."

<sup>17</sup> Some commentators who adopt the "generic humanity" interpretation recognize the royal language and imagery in the psalm, but argue, for various reasons, that the royal dimension has been democratized. See, for example, Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Psalms I: Psalms 1-72* (Old Testament Message 21; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983), 86-87.

<sup>18</sup> This "eschatological" reading is undergirded by my conviction that the Psalter should be read in close connection to Israel's eschatologically-oriented metanarrative.

<sup>19</sup> I therefore disagree with commentators such as Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 127-30, who argue that Psalm 45 can *only* be read as a messianic psalm, that is, as a prediction of the coming messiah. I contend that in the context of Israelite royal ideology the language of metaphorical divinity was appropriately used with reference to a human king. On the other hand, because the Davidic king foreshadows and anticipates the Messiah, a christological (i.e., messianic) reading of this psalm is also appropriate and is, in fact, ultimately the richer Christian interpretation.

called "god."<sup>20</sup> The same basic idea is found in 2 Samuel 14 and 19 where David is said to be "like an Angel of God."<sup>21</sup> Psalm 8:5 defines royal "divinity" in a slightly different way. While the double question in v. 4 ("What is Man ... and the son of Man ...?"<sup>22</sup>) admits that the Davidic king appears insignificant and inconsequential,<sup>23</sup> in reality he is the New Man, the true bearer of the divine image, and as such, is the man "made a little lower than God/gods." The second part of the verse extends the thought. True Man is *crowned* – can you hear the royal language? – with *God's* glory and honor!<sup>24</sup> Israel's kings were "little gods," metaphorically (or mythically) divine. In short, the exalted language of near-divinity combines the imagery of First Man and the Davidic King.

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<sup>20</sup> See also Ps 82:1, which may also refer to kings as gods: "God ... gives his judgment among the 'gods.'"

<sup>21</sup> 2 Sam 14:17: "... my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil." 14:20 "My Lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land." 2 Sam 19:27: "my lord the king is like an angel of God ..."

<sup>22</sup> This appears to be based on a stereotypical formula, the more significant variations of which are Job 7:17 ("What is man [שׂנוֹשׁ, 'enosh] that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention?"), Ps 144:3 ("O LORD, what is man [here אָדָם, 'adam] that you care for him, the son of man [here בֶּן־אֲנוֹשׁ, ben-'enosh] that you think of him?") (Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17-18: A Mistaken Scholarly Common Place," in *The World of the Arameans I: Biblical Studies in Honor of Paul-Eugène Dion* [eds. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers and Michael Weigl; Journal for the Old Testament Supplement Series 324; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 211). I suggest that in Psalm 8, the traditional formula is being used in a more specific context, that is, with reference to *the Man*, the Davidic king. Note verse 5 ("a little lower than the gods, crowned with glory and honor"), which is emphatically royal in its orientation. Another example is Ps 80:17 (Hebrew 18): "Let your hand rest on the man (יֵשׁוּ, 'ish) at your right hand, the son of man (בֶּן־אָדָם, ben-'adam) you have raised up for yourself." While this verse does not ask "What is man?" it shows that what appears to be "generic human" language could be used more narrowly to refer to "the man at God's right hand" (see Ps 110:1) and the man that God has "raised up" (or "strengthened") (אָמַט, 'amats; see Ps 89:21 [Hebrew 22]), in other words, the Davidic king.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Van Leeuwen, "Psalm 8.5," 211: "human lowliness vis-à-vis God." Cf. Jeffrey H. Tigay, "What is Man That You Have Been Mindful of Him? (On Psalm 8:4-5)," in *Love & Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (eds. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good; Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 169-71, who suggests that the focus is on man's "mortality and transitoriness."

<sup>24</sup> See VanGemenen, "Psalms," 113 ("'Glory' and 'honor' are attributes of God's kingship ([Ps.] 29:1; 104:1) ...") and Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalm 1-59: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 183 ("royal and divine grandeur").

Third, given the identity of Israel's king as Second Adam, it is not surprising that the latter part of the psalm moves on to describe his kingship in terms of world dominion.<sup>25</sup> Verses 7 and 8, with their echoes of the description in Genesis 1 and 2 of Adamic dominion over the animal realm, find their initial fulfillment in the figure of David. For example, in 1 Samuel's narrative defense of David's fitness for kingship, he is depicted as having dominion over the wild animals. In particular, in chapter 17 – the Goliath narrative – we find David uttering these words to Saul: "When a lion or bear ... carried off a sheep from the flock, I struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth." Dominion over the animals, and especially the wild beasts, is one of the marks of true humanity and true kingship.

Interestingly, 1 Sam 17 also encourages readers to make mental links between the wild beasts and Israel's Gentile enemies. In the same breath that David tells Saul of his victory over the lions and bears, he puts the Philistine into the same group: "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; [now] this uncircumcised Philistine *will be like one of them* ... The LORD, who has delivered me from the paw (lit., the hand) of the lion and the paw (lit., the hand) of the bear will deliver me from the hand (or better, the paw!) of this Philistine!" (1 Sam 17:36-37).<sup>26</sup> Then comes a wonderful moment of irony as Goliath mocks the young boy holding the slingshot: "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" (v. 43). In fact, Goliath unwittingly speaks the truth. He is an animal – less formidable than a lion or bear for that matter – and he is standing before the one who has just been anointed as Israel's king in waiting,<sup>27</sup> the one through whom Adamic dominion over creation – including the animal realm – is being restored.<sup>28</sup>

This metaphorical equation of animals and Gentiles finds one of its fullest Old Testament expressions in Daniel's apocalyptic vision of the four beasts emerging from the Abyss (chap 7).<sup>29</sup> The lion and the bear (again!), the leopard and the beast with ten horns represent four great

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<sup>25</sup> Psalm 2 moves in a similar direction. Because the Davidic king is Second Adam (i.e., the human son of God) (v. 7), the nations are his inheritance and the ends of the earth his possession (v. 8).

<sup>26</sup> The same Hebrew word, יָד, *yad*, is used three times.

<sup>27</sup> See 1 Sam 16:13: "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David with power" when Samuel anointed him. The pouring out of God's Spirit on David is probably another perspective on the concept bearing the divine image.

<sup>28</sup> The description of David in v. 42 is tantalizing. First, he is אַדְמוֹנִי, *'admônî*, "ruddy" (brown-red, or "earth-colored"). Is this a subtle connection back to the name of the Primal Man, אָדָם, *'adam*? He is also יָפֵה מְרֵאָה, *yepheh mar'eh*, "handsome" (literally, "beautiful in appearance"). In Ezek 28, "Adam language" is used to describe the king of Tyre and in v. 12 he is said to be כֶּלֶל יָפֵה, *kelîl yophî*, "perfect in beauty." Again, is the reference to David's appearance an additional hint of his Adamic identity? See also Ps 45:2 ("You [the Davidic King] are the most handsome of the songs of men").

<sup>29</sup> See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 291-97.

Gentile kingdoms. But in this vision, the authority of these beasts is stripped away and in their place stands "one like a son of man" (כֶּבֶד אִנָּשׁ, *kebar 'enash*) – the one true human – who is given "authority, glory and sovereign power" and "everlasting dominion" (Dan 7:13-14). Now, in the original context the identity of this character is not entirely clear but it seems to refer to either the nation of Israel<sup>30</sup> or possibly to a representative – and obviously royal – Israelite.<sup>31</sup>

My point? There is a stream of theological reflection in the Old Testament – and I have only taken a few soundings along its course – that speaks of Israel and her kings using what may be called second-Adam imagery: the godlike (or near-divine) human, the son of Man crowned with divine splendor, who rules over the animal kingdom, and by extension the animalized humanity of the Gentile kingdoms.<sup>32</sup> Psalm 8 floats in this stream. Read in the context of the Psalter, and read in the context of Israel's story, Psalm 8 is less interested in the dignity and worth of humanity in general, and more concerned with the dignity and worth, the glory and honor, of the true humanity, Israel, and the true human, David (and his descendants). It testifies less to a high general anthropology and more to a high "Israelology" and especially to a high "Davidology."

But once I interpret this psalm in connection with Israel and especially Israel's king, I am now bent in an eschatological direction. The stories of Israel and David are covenantal stories and therefore stories with a *telos*, or destiny. To describe the ideal of what Israel and David are meant to be – glorious and godlike and having dominion over creation – is to describe the ultimate destiny of Israel and "David" (understood now as a messianic figure). Once we read Psalm 8 in connection with Israel's covenantal history we are inevitably drawn towards an eschatological interpretation – one that finds its full and final meaning in the climax of Israel's story. Put another way, the primary thrust of Psalm 8 is not creational and static (what all humans are in Adam) but re-creational and eschatological (what Israel and "David" will become at the climax of history).<sup>33</sup>

I think this is exactly the angle from which New Testament writers interpret (or reinterpret) this psalm.<sup>34</sup> They do not appear to follow the "democratic" or "generic humanity" interpretation.

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<sup>30</sup> "The saints of the people of the Most High" in Dan 7:27 seems to parallel the "one like a Son of Man" in 7:13.

<sup>31</sup> The "Gentile = animal" equation continues into the New Testament. Note Jesus' exchange with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) in which both assume that the Gentiles are dogs at the family table.

<sup>32</sup> Somewhere in the background sits Gen 3:15. The image of the seed of the woman (the true human) with the head of the serpent's seed under foot seems to be echoed in Ps 8:6: "you put everything under his feet." See Walter Wifall, "Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974) 363.

<sup>33</sup> To identify this as a royal psalm, read in an eschatological direction, is another way of saying that I am adopting a *messianic* interpretation.

<sup>34</sup> Brueggemann, *Message*, 37, says, "The New Testament takes the royal vision of humanity and uses it to identify and characterize Jesus, who is the true king. But in doing so ... glory, honor,

Rather, they write from the conviction that Israel's story *has* reached its glorious climax, albeit surprisingly, in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth. In essence, they read Psalm 8 as prophecy<sup>35</sup> so that it cohered with that Christ-climax of Israel's story. For the apostles, therefore, the good news was that the "Man" of Psalm 8, Israel's final second Adam, the True New Human, was now enthroned at God's right hand (Ps 110:1; Acts 2:34) ruling over "the works of [God's] hands" (Ps 8:6) and that he was none other than Jesus, the one who called himself the "Son of Man."<sup>36</sup>

Hebrews 2:5-9 – the most interesting and creative New Testament interpretation of Psalm 8<sup>37</sup> – makes this point: Jesus stands at the climax of history, in the place of Adam and Israel and

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and dominion of the royal agent is profoundly transformed." Actually, I do not think that the transformation – in this case – is quite as great as Brueggemann (as a representative of the democratic interpretation) thinks. If there has been a transformation from the generic (humanity) to the particular (Jesus), that process had already begun at least with the redaction of the Psalter (in which the psalm refers to Israel/David).

<sup>35</sup> Acts 2:30. See James L. Kugel, "David the Prophet," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (ed. James L. Kugel; Myth and Poetics; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 45-55.

<sup>36</sup> Here I am obviously assuming that Jesus' use of the much-debated phrase "Son of Man" as a self-appellation was in some indirect way dependent on a messianic interpretation of Ps 8:4. For a recent discussion of this possibility, see Michael Goulder, "Psalm 8 and the Son of Man," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 18-29.

<sup>37</sup> Hebrews 2 shows how the provisional meanings of Old Testament texts are always subject to change in the light of the gospel. In Psalm 8, "being a little lower than the angels" and "crowned with glory and honor" are set in parallel. They are different ways of saying more or less the same thing. To be the true Adam (or David) was to be the true bearer of the divine image and so be a "little lower than the angels" (i.e., almost divine) and "crowned with glory." In other words, *both* clauses describe a condition of royal exaltation. For the writer of Hebrews, however, "a little lower than the angels" is an entirely inadequate description of Christ's exalted (i.e., post-resurrection) state because in that state he is decidedly *not* "a little lower than the angels." Therefore, exploiting some ambiguity latent in the Septuagint translation of Ps 8:6 (βραχύ, *brachu*, can either refer to status or time), this writer cracks the verse open and reinterprets it to fit his Christology. Rather than allowing the two halves of the verse to be conceptually parallel, he makes them temporally consecutive: *first* Christ was "made a *for a little while* lower than the angels" (incarnation and humiliation) and *then later* (at his resurrection and exaltation) "crowned with glory and honor" (see Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon," *Interpretation* 23 [1969]: 24-26). Is this "reading into" the text? Yes ... and no. Yes: the original meaning of Psalm 8:6 does not quite fit what the resurrection reveals about Jesus. So what does the author of Hebrews do? He interprets the psalm to make it fit Christ. It has turned out that Jesus is a surprisingly bigger, more incredible climax to Israel's story than Israel could ever have imagined: the Messiah is in fact elevated *above* the angels. So the writer of Hebrews expands and breaks open (or "blows up") Israel's understanding of what the Messiah-figure would be like and



David, but unlike his failed precursors, this man has "everything under him" (Heb 2:8, see also v. 5).<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, in 1 Cor 15:25, Paul's use of this psalm is re-creational-eschatological not creational-static. So when he says: "... [Christ] must reign until [God] has put all things under his feet" (quoting Ps 8:6 directly), he is not talking about the status of all humanity but about Christ – as the Second, and indeed Last Adam<sup>39</sup> – and his resurrection. For Paul, the fullest meaning of this verse is located in the climax of redemptive-history – and not the static condition of all humans – because the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ to God's right hand is the revelation of true Humanity and as such, the final fulfillment of this psalm.

Finally, in Eph 1:20-22, Paul again writes: "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. *And God placed all things under his feet* and appointed him to be head over everything for the church..." Read in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Psalm 8 does not speak of humanity in general or Adam or Israel or even David, at least not any more. It is now a "psalm of True David," about the True Human, Jesus the Messiah.

My goal here is not to "apply" this text<sup>40</sup> but rather to remind you of *your* "in-Christ history" and how it should shape your identity. For unless you know your history, you will never know who you are. And if you do not know who you are, you will not know how you should live.

So who are we? In unfallen Adam, we *once were* a little lower than God (or to use the language of Genesis 1-3, we *once were* bearers of the divine image and we were "like God"). We *once ruled*

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in so doing he makes Scripture conform to Christ. On the other hand, we must also recognize that this interpretative move is true to the metanarrative of redemption. This "making Scripture fit Christ" is undergirded by a deep belief that the metanarrative of redemptive history has reached its initial climax in the enthronement of Christ and ultimately will reach its final climax in the submission of all creation to him. Above all, it is this "sense of an ending" to Israel's story, rather than grammatical-historical exegesis, that controls apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament. See Dan G. McCartney, "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (ed. Harvie M. Conn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 101-16.

<sup>38</sup> In drawing a picture of Christ as God's Son, Hebrews 1 has already woven together "Adam" motifs (e.g., v. 6: "let all God's angels worship him") with Davidic language (note the quotes from 2 Sam 7:14, Pss 2:7, 45:6-7, 110:1).

<sup>39</sup> The explicit language of "Last Adam" will be used in 1 Cor 15:45.

<sup>40</sup> Application would begin to work out the ethical implications of defining true image-bearing humanity in union with Christ rather than our union with Adam. Conversely, it would also look, for example, at Paul's ethical instructions to believers as painting a picture of what it means to be truly human.

creation. But through Adam's sin we have fallen from that lofty position. *Compared to what we once were*, we are no longer "truly human." In fact, we became, as it were, beasts as much as human. To put this another way, through Adam, humanity's story is Nebuchadnezzar's story. We are kings who have become animals (Dan 4:22). Apart from Christ, rather than being humans in the divine image, we grow "hair like the feathers of an eagle, and nails like the claws of a bird" (Dan 4:33). We who were once a little lower than God became a little higher than beasts.<sup>41</sup>

By this radically "Christocentric" reading of Psalm 8,<sup>42</sup> I want to say that ultimately *humans have value, dignity and honor only as they are in Christ*. (Perhaps I should soften this: whatever dignity humans have through being in Adam looks like bestial dishonor when viewed from the perspective of the true humanity of the risen Christ). It is only as we are united to Christ and indwelt by his Spirit that we humans can claim to be bearers of the divine image, crowned with glory and honor. At least, this kind of thinking stands behind Paul's reflections in Ephesians on our identity. As we saw in Eph 1:20-22, for Paul, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 8. But in Eph 2:6, Paul also says that "God raised us up *with Christ* and seated us *with him* in the heavenly realms *in Christ Jesus*." And if we are seated in the heavenly realms in Christ we are no longer beasts, but finally, and only, in Christ, both "a little lower than God" and "a little *higher* than the angels,"<sup>43</sup> "crowned with glory and honor" and "ruling over all the works of God's hands."

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<sup>41</sup> Daniel 4 has affinities with Psalm 82, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. In each passage, a king is cast down (from heaven?) to some state of dishonor.

<sup>42</sup> Or to use the better term: *Christotelic*. Since I am working in narrative categories, I find it more accurate to speak of Christ as the climax, goal, end, *telos* (rather than center) of the metanarrative of redemption. This term derives from Richard B. Hays, "On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*," in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 83; Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 1; Sheffield JSOT Press, 1993), 77-78, where he refines his earlier use, in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) of the term "ecclesiotelic."

<sup>43</sup> Here I am exploiting the ambiguity inherent in the Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים, 'elohim (see above). For the writer of Hebrews, when Christ is raised from the dead and "crowned with glory and honor" he leaves the dishonored condition of being "lower than the angels." In fact, he is made higher than the angels (see Heb 1:3-4: "After he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs"; see also 1:5-7, 13-14). Through Christ, we too share the same destiny (Heb 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to *serve* those who will inherit salvation?" Also 1 Cor 6:3: "... we will judge angels."). Christ's story is now our story, except that we are not God. Therefore we can say that in Christ we who were a little (or, depending on your perspective, a lot) lower than אֱלֹהִים, 'elohim, the "gods" (i.e., the angels) have been made a little lower than אֱלֹהִים, 'elohim, God! Of course, in saying this I am speaking of our standing (or sitting!) rather than ontology. This should be evident from Eph 2:6 read in connection with Eph 1:20 (and ultimately Ps 110:1). We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms ... at God's right hand, that is, "a little lower than God!"

I conclude on the same note that the psalm ends with – worship. When we stop and think that in Christ we have been transformed from "beasts of the field" in v. 7 to the godlike true-humanity of v. 5, what else is there to say but "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

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