

PSALM 8 | THE OVERVIEW EFFECT

“The overview effect is a cognitive shift in awareness reported by some astronauts during spaceflight, often while viewing the Earth from outer space. It is the experience of seeing first-hand the reality of the Earth in space, which is immediately understood to be a tiny, fragile ball of life, “hanging in the void”, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. The effect may also invoke a sense of transcendence and connection with humanity as a whole, from which national borders appear petty.” Source: Wikipedia, “Overview Effect”

Psalm 8 To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Setting

1. This Psalm forms a frame drawing our focus to the point: how majestic God is! (vv1, 8)
2. It's top-to-bottom journey from the heights of the heavens right down to beasts, birds and fish. A poetic reflection of the creation story.
3. Contains a series of connected contrasts meant to give us a sense of scale
4. At the center is a simple, profound question: What is man that you are mindful of him? (4)
5. This entire perspective causes us to burst out in praise.

1. Consider the Greatness of God the Creator

- A. God sets his glory above the heavens and sets them with his mere fingers. (1,3)

The heavens are the work of God's “fingers.”
The heavens are tiny in comparison to God.
The heavens are vast in comparison to humanity.

- B. God silences his opposition through the chatter of children, such is his power. (2)

Sounds of opposition are silenced by the babbling of children.

Matthew 21:15-16 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, 16 and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ““Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

2. Consider the Care of the Creator

- A. What is man that you are mindful of him? (4)

In light of the grandeur and greatness of all that God has made, why does God uniquely care for humanity?

The scale and contrast of this setting forces these questions.

God shows his incomparable care in how he created humanity.

Genesis 2:7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

- B. YET God made humanity lower than heavenly beings, crowning with glory and honor and giving dominion over the work of his hands. (6-8)

God made humanity with glory in mind.

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Humanity is given everything, crowned with glory and honor. Humans are given responsibility to take what has been given and nourish it, cultivate it, to expand the garden and allow life to flourish with the dignity suited crowned creation.

This responsibility, this dignified role, this glory hasn't been taken away.

This glory is not being achieved fully. It is impaired, but not destroyed. Psalm 8 sits in the context of the curse.

This tension is known to God.

Psalm 103:13-14 "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."

His care continues in the midst of the tension of the curse.

3. Consider the continued care of God, the Sustainer.

Hebrews 2:6-10 It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Jesus comes down and "becomes obedient to death on a cross" to bring renewed dignity to humanity, to "bring many sons to glory." Such is the Father's care for us.

You can cast your cares upon him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7). You can live in the dignity of cultivation, formed in dust but created for glory, because God cared enough to send his only son to make a way for you.

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

Spend some time contemplating the heavens, considering the scale of Psalm 8, asking God for perspective and a heart full of praise.