

## A Messianic Reading of Psalm 8

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### ABSTRACT

*The well-known and beloved introduction to Ps 8, “O LORD, our Lord, how magnificent is your name . . .” could also read “O LORD, our Lord, what is the magnificent one of your name . . .” It is argued that although no known tradition for this proposed reading exists, it is well supported by text critical, grammatical, and literary arguments, and indeed seems to solve the multitude of problems connected to the prevalent reading tradition that derived from the LXX. A translation, based on this premise, is proposed. Furthermore, the NT uses of Ps 8 (LXX) also serve as argument that at least the central part of this psalm was interpreted as a messianic reference directly related to the anthropology of Gen 1. The inference is that a pre-Christian messianic reading of the whole Ps 8 could have existed, unfortunately overridden by the “Name Theology” of the LXX and its successors.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key words:** Messianic reading, Psalm 8, textual criticism, literary criticism, LXX, anthropology

### A INTRODUCTION

The exclamation “O LORD, our Lord, how wonderful is your name in all the earth. . .” or words to this effect, is following the Septuagint interpretation of Ps 8:2 (English v. 1). It could be assumed that the Hebrew “Vorlage” for this first Greek translation does not differ radically from the MT in our possession (BHS). The introductory wording of LXX Ps 8 (Ralphs’s) therefore presents a certain reading of the MT. The choice that the Greek translators made regarding אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ, was to read it as an adjective in a predicate relationship with שְׁמֶךָ – represented by θαυμαστόν τὸ ὄνομά σου . . . (“wonderful<sup>2</sup> is your name”). With this assumed construction of אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ, the אֲדִיר at the beginning of the phrase could only be understood as an “introduction to an exclamation in which a speaker usually expresses a *value judgment* about something”<sup>3</sup> – represented in the LXX by ὡς

<sup>1</sup> **Article submitted:** 2014/01/08; **accepted:** 2014/06/17.

<sup>2</sup> Translated as “wonderful” in Wycliffe Bible, CEV; “majestic” in ESV, CEB, NIV, NRSV; “excellent” in 1599 Geneva Bible (also suggesting “noble” or “marvellous”), KJV, NKJV, ASV, “glorious” in Complete Jewish Bible, “grande” in Jubilee Bible (2000, Spanish).

<sup>3</sup> Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (BL: Hebrew; Sheffield Academic Press, 2006 [1999]), 325 [iv].

(*how* [exclamation]).<sup>4</sup> This Septuagint reading of *מָה־אֲדִיר־שִׁמְךָ* was accepted and followed by all translations known to me, both ancient<sup>5</sup> and modern.<sup>6</sup> With this exegetical move, the tradition was set that Ps 8 opens and closes with an exclamation on the majesty of the divine name (vv. 2-3, 10), while the centre piece (rhetorically) questions the position of humankind within the cosmos (vv. 5-9, with v. 4 as introduction). The key word *מָה* therefore took on two different functions in the same psalm, namely introducing an exclamation (vv. 2-3, 10), as well as a (rhetorical) question (v. 5).

While it seems to be a fact that the mentioned tradition has never been seriously challenged (the Masoretic accentuation is inconclusive<sup>7</sup>), the psalm is notorious for its linguistic and interpretational problems in the first part.<sup>8</sup> The syntax of *אֲשֶׁר* in v. 2b (English: 1b) is in question, already from the time of the psalm translation of the LXX,<sup>9</sup> up to this very day;<sup>10</sup> *תְּנֶה* in its present

<sup>4</sup> Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel and Katrin Hauspie, eds., in collaboration with G. Chamberlain, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Vol. 2; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), 527.

<sup>5</sup> Syriac, Targums, Vulgate. The Targums add wording to confirm this interpretation *אֲרַעָא בְּכֹלֵא אַרְעָא* ("How exalted and praiseworthy is your name and praise on all the earth"). See *Targum Psalms*, n.p. [cited 9 June 2013]. Online: <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/showtargum.php?bookname=27&chapter=008&verse=2&Peshitta=&Sam=>

<sup>6</sup> All modern translations to my knowledge, including ASV, CEVUK, CEB, Luther Revised, De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling, ESV, Geneva Bible, Jubilee Bible, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, Nova Vulgata, Nouvelle Bible Segond, NAV (Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling).

<sup>7</sup> The maqqēf between *מָה* and *אֲדִיר* is a proclitic connection, while the (conjunctive) *mûnah* under *אֲדִיר* connects the proclisis with *שִׁמְךָ*. The Masoretic signs do not seem to confirm the LXX reading as such. See Van der Merwe, Naudé and Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 43-44, 364; William R. Scott, *A Simplified Guide to BHS* (Richard Hills, Tex.: Bibal Press, 20074), 34.

<sup>8</sup> For linguistic problems, see Herbert Donner, "Ugaritismen in der Psalmenforschung," *ZAW* 79/3 (1967): 324-327; Werner H. Schmidt, "Gott und Mensch in Ps 8: form- und überlieferungsgeschichtliche Erwägungen," *TZ* 25/1 (1969): 4-5; Frank Crüsemann, "Die Macht der kleinen Kinder: Ein Versuch, Psalm 8,2b.3 zu verstehen," in *Was ist der Mensch ...? Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Hans Walter Wolff zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. Frank Crüsemann, Christoff Hardmeier and Reiner Kessler; München: Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 48-57; J. Alberto Soggin, "Textkritische Untersuchung von Ps. VIII vv. 2-3 und 6," *VT* 21/5D (1971): 565-571. The conviction of Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1-50* (vol. 1 of *Psalms*; AB; New York: Doubleday & Co, 1965), 105 is typical: "MT is anomalous, both with respect to the syntax of *אֲשֶׁר* and the vocalization of *תְּנֶה*."

<sup>9</sup> The LXX, and therefore all versions deriving from it, could not explain the antecedent of *אֲשֶׁר* properly. The LXX *ὅτι ἐπήρθη ἡ μεγαλοπρέπεια σου ὑπεράνω τῶν οὐρανῶν* is obviously an effort to make meaning of the problematic *אֲשֶׁר תְּנֶה. ἐπήρθη* is the passive aorist of *ἐπαίρω* = raise up, lift, exalt. It is assumed that a Hebrew "Vorlage" with another reading was used, but it could probably be an effort to make

(vocalised) form is linguistically unacceptable.<sup>11</sup> Verse 2b as well as the entire v. 3 (English v. 2) is a *crux interpretum*.<sup>12</sup> The scholarly reaction is to

sense of תְּנָה. But that still does not explain ὄτι.

<sup>10</sup> In modern day exegesis the following solutions have been offered:

a. אֲשֶׁר represents the divine You of the addressed "O LORD, our Lord." See Johannes P. Floß, "YHWH, unser Herr, wie wunderbar [ist] auf der ganzen Erde dein Name! Psalm 8 gelesen nach dem Modell des semiologischen Konstruktivismus," in *Studien zu Psalmen und Propheten: Festschrift für Hubert Irsigler* (ed. Carmen Diller, Martin Mulzer, Kristinn Ólason and Ralf Rothenbusch; HBS 64; Freiburg im Breisgau / New York: Herder, 1990), 33. Floß concedes that "Einen euklidischen Beweis kann diese Deutung zwar nicht für sich in Anspruch nehmen. Sie hat aber den Vorsug, ohne Texteingriffe auszukommen."

b. Tournay, with his interest in the name theology presented by and in this psalm, makes the Name of Yahweh the antecedent of אֲשֶׁר. See Raymond J. Tournay, "Le Psaume 8 et la doctrine biblique du nom," *RB* 78/1 (1971): 26.

c. Bernhard Duhm has made the creative move of emending אֲשֶׁר תְּנָה to נָה אֲשֶׁרָה "I will sing (your glory above heaven)." See Herbert Donner, "Ugaritismen," 324-327. Duhm is applauded by Schmidt, "Gott und Mensch," 4-5.

d. This type of exercise was repeated by Dahood in his own way in his 1965 Psalm commentary, *Psalms 1*, 104: emending the mentioned phrase to אֲשֶׁר תְּנָה, a supposedly *pi'el* perf (1 sing) with a so-called energetic ending which Dahood discovered in Ugaritic texts, allegedly from the verb שָׂרָה = serve. Dahood renders the phrase "I will worship your majesty above the heavens."

e. Crüsemann, *Die Macht*, 57 changes אֲשֶׁר to אֲשֶׁרָה, the Canaanite goddess from whose milk the children get divine strength, as an attempt to solve the mystery of the children from whose mouths divine might goes out.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome, the Peshitta and Targums translated with "you gave," assuming that תְּנָה derives from a scribal error of the 2nd masculine singular form of נָתַן. Referred and supported by Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary* (CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 178 note 1a, who translates "You have 'laid' your splendor on the heavens." Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 139-140 changes the vocalisation to תְּנָה, a term which would denote repeated anti-phonal song, with reference to the hymns sung by celestial beings as alluded in Isa 6:3, 1 Kgs 22:19, Job 1:6, 38:7, and translates, "Thou whose glory is praised in the heavens." Weiser draws his support from Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1955), 2047 and John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament* (Vetus Testamentum Supplement, vol. V, Brill, 1957), 156ff. A version of this same "solution" is to assume תְּנָה to be a perfect active form of the same verb, "your name which tells (or: proclaims)." Nico A. van Uchelen, *1-40* (vol. 1 of *Psalmen*; POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979), 55 arrives at more or less the same translation in the passive, but directly from תְּנָה which is attested in the *qal* form in Judges 5:11, 40; Van Uchelen assumes the *pu'al* תְּנָה here, "sung by the mouth . . ."

<sup>12</sup> The LXX probably works with another text where עָז (might) becomes ἀνός (praise) "from the mouth of children." According to Crüsemann, *Die Macht*, 49, this verse, in spite of its linguistic clarity, belongs to the most controversial in the entire

courageously admit interpretational failure, blaming either the interpreter<sup>13</sup> or the text,<sup>14</sup> and/or to come up with some kind of sensible understanding by proposing emendations and alterations to the MT.<sup>15</sup>

To summarise: the two outstanding factors surrounding the interpretation of Ps 8 are the unquestioned translation tradition set by the Septuagint in v. 2-3 (and by implication v. 10) and the notorious problems in understanding the MT in these very same passage(s). In addition there is the core question from a literary-poetic, but also from a theological point of view whether the psalm is communicating two different issues (introduced by the two posed functions of מָה), or only one.<sup>16</sup> The mere fact that the introductory מָה in the centre piece (v. 5) is not understood by the Septuagint in the same way as those in vv. 2 and 10, but "as an introduction to a *rhetorical question* in which a speaker usually expresses a *value judgment* about something or someone,"<sup>17</sup> is begging a question of consistency. Is it justifiable that the very same repeating introductory word within one poem is understood in different ways?

It seems that linguistic, literary and theological attempts focused on solutions for interpretational problems caused by the prevalent understanding of the psalm have thus far not given sufficient attention to anomalies caused by the LXX reading of especially מָה-אֲדִיר שְׁמָךְ. A re-examination of the possibilities latent in this phrase could shed new light on the present interpretational problems.

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OT. Schmidt, *Gott und Mensch*, 6, suggests that it is better to keep the sense of v. 3 open, as it plays no role in the rest of the Psalm, and bears no special significance.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Donner is of the opinion that in its present form no real sense can be made of v. 3. See Donner, "Ugaritismen," 326.

<sup>14</sup> For example the opinion of Schmidt, *Gott und Mensch*, 4: "Da V. 2b außerdem textlich fragwürdig und syntaktisch unmöglich ist, wird die Vermutung, daß der Versteil zerstört ist, zur Gewißheit."

<sup>15</sup> See discussion in footnote 8.

<sup>16</sup> See Susan Gillingham, "Psalm 8 through the Looking Glass: Reception History of a Multi-Faceted Psalm," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (ed. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger (Jr.) and W. Dennis Tucker (Jr.); New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 167-196, for an insightful discussion of the paradigm shift between creation and redemption in the reception history of this psalm, as is evident in translations, expositions, liturgical hymns, and artistic representations in both Judaism and Christianity.

<sup>17</sup> See Van der Merwe, Naudé and Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 325 [iii].

## B A RE-EXAMINATION OF מְהֵרָאֲדִיר שְׁמָךְ

The core word determining the meaning of the phrase seems to be the adjective אֲדִיר. It occurs 27 times in the OT, in the semantic ranges of strength, beauty, size, status and authority.<sup>18</sup> Possible English versions may be "mighty, powerful, formidable, glorious, magnificent, marvelous, splendid, noble, important."<sup>19</sup> *The Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* identifies two main fields, which are actually overlapping, namely (a) description of a state or process "pertaining to inspiring awe and respect because of one's beauty, size, strength, or status"<sup>20</sup> and (b) leaders endowed with these attributes. Soggin briefly describes אֲדִיר as an attribute of royal dignity which includes Yahweh.<sup>21</sup>

As already stated, the Septuagint chose to interpret אֲדִיר as an adjective in a predicate relationship with שְׁמָךְ (θαυμαστόν τὸ ὄνομά σου...) with the inevitable result that מְהֵ had to be understood as an introduction to an exclamation ("how!"). This interpretation is justified in the light of the other examples of this type of construction in the psalms, although it should be noted that only three other texts properly fit this form.<sup>22</sup> Constructions without מְהֵ but with an adjective in a predicate relation to שָׁם in the Psalms are found in two other passages.<sup>23</sup> A seemingly strong, though circular argument for the LXX interpretation is the so-called Name Theology, where the Name could fully represent the Deity without being identical to Him.<sup>24</sup> The introduction of Ps 8 about the "Name of YHWH" that is "awesome in all the earth" would then be an apt summation of the cosmic implications of this theology. The argument could

<sup>18</sup> See Renier de Blois, "אֲדִיר" *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (Working Project of United Bible Societies 2000-2009, eds. Reinier de Blois and Enio R. Mueller, n.p. cited 29 September 2013. Online:

<http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Jenni, "אֲדִיר" *THAT* 1: 38: "mächtig, gewaltig, herrlich, vornehm."

<sup>20</sup> Referring to mighty (leaders) (Ps 136:18), mighty, powerful (gods) (1 Sam 4:8), mighty God (Pss 76:5; 93:4, Isa 10:34a); mighty (nation) (Ezek 32:18); mighty (warship) (Isa 33:21); mighty (waters) (Exod 15:10; Ps 93:4); noble (person because of his/her devotion to God) (Ps 16:3); (God's) majestic, glorious (name, reputation) (Ps 8:2,10); noble, mighty, towering (tree) (Isa 10:34b, Ezek 17:23; Zech 11:2). Renier du Blois, "אֲדִיר," Online: <http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html>

<sup>21</sup> Soggin, "Textkritische Untersuchung," 566.

<sup>22</sup> See Ps 31:20, מְהֵ רַב־טוֹבוֹבָה (LXX 30:20, ὡς πολὺ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς χρηστότητος σου), Ps 66:3, מְהֵ גִּוְרָא מַעֲשֶׂה (LXX 65:3, ὡς φοβερά τὰ ἔργα σου), Ps 84:2, מְהֵ יְדִידוֹת מִשְׁבֻּנוֹתֶיךָ (LXX 85:2, ὡς ἀγαπητὰ τα σκηνοματὰ σου).

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 75:2, קָרוֹב שְׁמָךְ and 76:2, שְׁמוֹ יָדוּלָהּ.

<sup>24</sup> Theodoor C. Vriezen, *Hooflijnen der Theologie van het Oude Testament* (Wageningen: H. Veenman en Zonen, 1974), 226. According to Vriezen this theology originated with the Deuteronomist, with his suggestion that the Name of Yahweh lives in the sanctuary, in order to create a distance between God-self and the temple. Behind this subtle "critical theology" the preaching of the prophets may be assumed.

be strengthened by taking the psalm's canonical context into mind: it is framed by utterances highlighting the Name of YHWH Elyon, the covenant Lord of Israel in his position as the Superb One of the cosmos: "I will sing the Name of YHWH Elyon" (7:18); "I will sing your name, Elyon" (9:3). It is therefore not out of the order to understand Ps 8 within this frame of reference as an exclamation of awe at the superiority of the Divine Name.<sup>25</sup> But, once again, this argument does not originate from the text of the psalm, but from a theological stance, which could be supported by utterances in the adjacent psalms. The linguistic problems of such a reading of Ps 8 remains, and in fact were caused by the very reading itself.

### C AN ALTERNATIVE READING OF מְהֵאֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ

The alternative which, to my knowledge, is not attested, is to read מְהֵאֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ as a poetic parallelism of מְהֵאֲנוּשׁ and what follows, in v. 5. This implies that מְהֵ has to be read as an introduction to a rhetorical question, as is the case in v. 5. To be able to do so, the relation between אֲדִיר and שְׁמֶךָ should be read as a genitive construct. Therefore the adjective אֲדִיר has to be perceived as a substantive (noun) in the construct form. The form is ambiguous and may be understood as either an absolute or a construct form, so that no consonant or vowel changes are necessary. Translated into the English, such reading of אֲדִיר would be "noble one" (or any other designation well expressed by אֲדִיר like "majestic one," "glorious one," "excellent one," etc.). Since שֵׁם is already "defined" (made definite) by the pronominal suffix 2nd masculine singular, שְׁמֶךָ carries its definiteness "back" onto the construct noun אֲדִיר. Literally אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ would then read "The noble one of your name." Therefore the question posed in vv. 2 and 10 would be, "What is the noble one of your name...?" At

<sup>25</sup> Patrick D. Miller takes Pss 4-14 as the context of Ps 8, with Pss 7 to 9 as the psalms that are bound together by the "Name" of YHWH. See Patrick D. Miller, "What is a Human Being? The Anthropology of Scripture," in *What About the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology* (ed. Joel B. Green; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 68-69. See also James L. Mays, "The Self in the Psalms and the Image of God," in *God and Human Dignity* (ed. R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead, Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2006), 33. Marvin E. Tate elaborates on the "intertextuality" of Ps 8: "Intertextually, we may take the speaker in Psalm 8 to be the one who speaks in Psalm 7; indeed, the same as the speaker in Psalms 3 through 7. The canonical position of the psalm seems important, because it follows the laments in Psalms 3 through 7 and is followed in turn by the twin Psalms 9-10, which focus on the kingship of Yahweh: "Yahweh is King forever and ever" (Ps 10:16). Psalms 9-10 also serve as an elongated supplement to Psalm 8, which does not explicitly refer to the kingship of Yahweh, but is replete with the language and thought of the royal qualities of divine monarchy. Psalms 9-10 are followed by Psalms 11-14, which have the form of individual laments and serve as a counterpart to Psalms 3-7." See Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28/4 (2001): 344.

first glance this reading sounds odd. But further elaboration should drive the point home that this is indeed a viable option, and indeed fully supported by the MT.<sup>26</sup>

A supportive argument for this reading is that other examples of the construction {substantival adjective + שְׁמֵךְ (denoting YHWH’s name)} are attested in the Psalms, at least in two different phrases in four texts.<sup>27</sup> This specific syntactical phrase preceded by מִהּ is, however, not attested, at least not in the Psalms. This reading shows a close similarity with אֱהָבֵי שְׁמֵךְ in Pss 5:12, 69:37, 119:132 and יוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֵךְ in Ps 9:11.<sup>28</sup> In both cases the substantive preceding שְׁמֵךְ are classified as qal active participles, referring to persons related to YHWH’s name, as is presumedly the case with אֱדִיר שְׁמֵךְ. How the relationship is perceived, whether as an “objective” or “subjective” genitive, is another matter to be determined in each individual case. But formally אֱדִיר שְׁמֵךְ in the suggested reading does not appear in isolation within the Psalter.

A search for an alternative reading of מְהֵרָאֱדִיר שְׁמֵךְ as translated by the LXX and the subsequent interpretation tradition was initially motivated by the quest for poetic parallelism (with מְהֵרָאֱנוֹשׁ and what follows, in v. 5). The actual motivation is therefore to see whether it could not have been the original intention of the poet to focus on only one matter, namely the exalted state of YHWH’s royal representative. Once it is established that מְהֵרָאֱדִיר שְׁמֵךְ can indeed be read as a parallelism of מְהֵרָאֱנוֹשׁ *etcetera*, the “reshaping” of the psalm into a consistent poetic unit is surely a strong argument for this reading. I propose a translation which should put this point into clearer perspective and present additional arguments in favour of this reading.

#### D EXPLANATORY NOTES ON MY TRANSLATION ATTEMPT

- (i) אֱדִיר שְׁמֵךְ expresses the relationship between God’s Name and the person characterised by the substantive, אֱדִיר, the awe inspiring leader, because of his undisputed air of authority and charisma. This “excellent / majestic / noble / marvelous / awesome one” is directly related to the Name of YHWH and what it may imply, for instance his divine presence and rule on earth. “The awesome one of your Name” could therefore be translated in many different ways, depending on the nuance within the spectrum of human-divine relationships expressed by this entitlement. There are multiple possibilities, for instance “Your awesome representative,” or “The representative of your awesome presence” or “The One who leads/rules in your Name” or “The powerful leader, authorised by you,” *etcetera*.

<sup>26</sup> Even the accent markers seemingly pose no problem.

<sup>27</sup> אֱהָבֵי שְׁמֵךְ in Ps 5:12; 69:37; 119:132; יוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֵךְ in Ps 9:11.

<sup>28</sup> עַל-כֹּל-שְׁמֵךְ in Ps 138:2 also seems to fall in this category.

- (ii) The prepositional phrase בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ "in the whole earth" qualifies the nominal construct unit אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ and not שְׁמֶךָ *per se*, as in the LXX and other readings. הָאָרֶץ could refer to "the land (of Israel)," but the multiple connections of the psalm with Gen 1 is a convincing argument to perceive הָאָרֶץ as "the world." Verse 2 (and 10) therefore re-examines the quality of "the noble one of your name" by means of the rhetorical question "What is (the status, potential, power, magnificence, etc. of) your world-wide representative . . .?" The status of humanity, in the subsequent wording of the psalm, "a little lower than the 'elohim" (the divine beings which make up God's court), therefore the position of man as image of God,<sup>29</sup> is questioned at the very beginning of the psalm.
- (iii) In this option the antecedent of the relative marker אֲשֶׁר is no more in doubt, but clearly refers to the person under discussion, אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ.
- (iv) תָּנָה is given a slight change of vocalisation, changing it into a *pu'al* with a passive meaning,<sup>30</sup> without any tampering with the consonants. This verb is attested in Judges 5:11 and 11:40 in the *pi'el*, and if translated consistently it can be rendered as "sing" in the sense of a repetitive anti-phonal song.<sup>31</sup>
- (v) The reading of אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ as a nominal construct unit denoting a person, opens the way, nudges, and compels the reader of the poem to perceive הוֹדֶךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם "your splendour above the heavens," as a poetic parallelism of אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ, with the two poetic lines separated by אֲשֶׁר תָּנָה. Therefore (עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם) הוֹדֶךָ refers to the very same person in the first member of the parallel, and not to YHWH's name *per se*. הוֹד serves as a synonym of אֲדִיר.<sup>32</sup> הוֹדֶךָ (עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם) as parallelism of אֲדִיר (בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ) שְׁמֶךָ takes up the latter, but says more about him.<sup>33</sup> He as

<sup>29</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon," *Interpretation* 23/1 (1969): 22.

<sup>30</sup> According to Soggin, "Textkritische Untersuchung," 567, this reading was already suggested in the past by Morgenstern, E. J. Kissane, J. Hempel, R. Tournay, C. Schedl, B. S. Childs, and A. Weiser.

<sup>31</sup> Therefore it is translated in NIV in Judges 5:11 as "recite." See also Vinzenz Hamp, "Ps 8,2b.3," *BZ* 16/1 (1972): 119; Van Uchelen, *Psalmen 1*, 55; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 139-140. This could be an indication that the psalm is actually a praise song, which could be an important item during the celebration of the enthronement or reaffirmation of the new (vassal) king.

<sup>32</sup> In English the similarity and difference could be expressed with "Splendid One" and "Splendour" respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Tremper Longman (III), "Literature, Interpretation and Theology," *NIDOTTE* 1: 120: "The new paradigm for understanding parallelism is development rather than equivalence. The biblical poet is doing more than saying the same thing twice. The

“The Splendid One of YHWH’s Name *in all the earth*” is praised as “The Splendour of YHWH above the earth,” indeed “*above the heavens (skies)*.” עֲלֵה־שָׁמַיִם should here be understood as part of God’s creation according to Gen 1, as the realm where the sun, moon and stars were created to govern day and night (Gen 1:14-18). This motive is found back in the central part of the Psalm. “The splendid one of your name *in all the earth*” is acknowledged as “Your splendour *above the heavens (skies)*.” The movement is from earth to heaven. In the second part of the psalm (vv. 4-9) the movement starts from heaven (vv. 4-7), and ends on earth where the poem started (vv. 8-10). In terms of “vertical grammar of parallelism in Hebrew poetry”<sup>34</sup> בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ and עֲלֵה־שָׁמַיִם – in this case both prepositional phrases – are to be brought into a direct relationship with each other. Since the rest of the parallelism is not antithetical, these two elements most probably complement each other, thereby indicating the totality of creation, echoing וְהָאָרֶץ וְהַשָּׁמַיִם of Gen 1:1.

- (vi) The poem consists of three stanzas, all asking the rhetorical question, מָה, “what?” regarding the royal representative of YHWH. Stanza three is a repetition of the beginning of stanza one and both starts with the invocation “YHWH, our Lord.” Stanza two has a prelude (v. 4) before the crucial question of man’s divinely appointed position, which highlights its high status, contrasting it with the rulers of the night skies.<sup>35</sup> Stanza two furthermore elaborates on the subjects of humanity’s rule (vv. 8-9). The prelude and elaboration of stanza two link it with stanzas one and three, allowing for multiple potential correlations among the thrice repeated rhetorical question.<sup>36</sup> There are enough synonyms and semantic

second part always nuances the first part in some way.” (Referring to Kugel’s suggested formula: “A, what is more B”).

<sup>34</sup> See David T. Tsumura, “Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry,” *JBL* 128/1 (2009): 167-181.

<sup>35</sup> Psalm 8 and Gen 1 have a direct relationship. According to Gen 1, before the creation of mankind God makes (עשה) the moon to rule (משל), to be “ruler” (מְשֻׁלָּת) of the night, with the stars added as afterthought (vv. 16, 18), whereas in Ps 139:9 the moon and stars are both the “rulers” (מְשֻׁלָּוֹת) of the night. Genesis 1:26-28 does not explicitly say man was made “to rule,” but “to subject.” Psalm 8:7, however, takes up the same verbs as in Gen 1:16-18 for the function of mankind – תַּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בַּמַּעֲשֵׂי יָדָיךְ. Psalm 8:5, the prelude to the real question about the rule of man, stops short of mentioning the moon and stars as rulers, but only states that YHWH “established” (בּוֹן) them, an equivalent of נָתַן in Gen 1:17. The function of the “prelude” (v. 5) seems therefore to focus the attention on man to whom God handed over the dominion of his handiwork – including the “the work of your fingers” // “your heavens” (8:4a). Therefore v. 2b places YHWH’s representative (הוֹדֵד // אֲדִיר שָׁמַיִם) “above the heavens” (עֲלֵה־שָׁמַיִם).

<sup>36</sup> For instance “the moon and stars which you established” (בּוֹן) could be initially

similarities in all three stanzas to sense that the poem in all its parts is speaking about the same person and issue, namely the question of the quality of the divine representative of YHWH'S rule.<sup>37</sup> However, within the context of joyful worship, this is not only a question in need of an answer but could also indeed be an exclamation of joy and wonder!<sup>38</sup>

- (vii) This close-knit interrelationship between stanzas 1/3 and 2 places the introductory and conclusive stanzas (one and three) within the context of a covenant relationship between YHWH and human kind. The latter is described as (עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם) (בְּכֹל-הָאָרֶץ) אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ in stanza one, parallel to הוֹדֵדָה in stanza three, and in stanza two as אָנוּשׁ // בְּן-אָדָם. These terms are all parallel to one another.<sup>39</sup> The implication of this divine-human covenantal relationship is that key words in stanza two should be understood within that same semantic field, specifically the (*qal*) verbs זָכַר<sup>40</sup> and פָּקַד.<sup>41</sup>

seen as the manifestation of the "power" which YHWH established (יָסַד, *pi'el*) against the enemy, which is then corrected by "what is man. . .?," with a flashback to "what is the glorious one of your name?"

<sup>37</sup> Otto Kaiser notes that the background of v. 6 is the old mythology of the king as image and at the same time the son and representative of God on earth, which is to be found back in the Egyptian royal ideology. Applied to the priestly anthropology "Der Mensch ist gewiss gottähnlich, aber damit eben nicht gottgleich." See Otto Kaiser, "Erwägungen zu Psalm 8," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 208. This background, however, is already visible from the onset on the psalm and a setting (*Sitz im Leben*) could be posed of a possible interrogation ritual as part of the enthronement of the vassal king, during which formalised critical questions regarding the qualities of the new king would have been asked, in order to affirm his rule. This study, however, is not aimed at positing a theory of the setting (*Sitz*) of the psalm.

<sup>38</sup> John Barach, "The Glory of the Son of Man: An Exposition of Psalm 8," in *The Glory of Kings: A Festschrift in Honor of James B. Jordan* (ed. Peter J. Leithart and John Barach; Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 7. Barach refers to the function of the Psalms as liturgical material, and is most probably influenced by the traditional interpretation of vv. 3 and 10 as "How wonderful . . ." I added his remark, since it could point to the background of the psalm as a praise song for the new vassal king.

<sup>39</sup> Ludwig Köhler is of the opinion that 'enôš is referring to the collective "humanity," and *ben-'âdâm* to the individual – the same movement found in Ps 144:3. See Ludwig Köhler, "Alttestamentliche Wortforschung: Psalm 8:5," *TZ* 1/1 (1945): 78.

<sup>40</sup> זָכַר as remember in the sense of taking up and re-enacting the covenant of old in the present, also in view of the future. זָכַר plays a prominent role in the covenant of YHWH with Israel (in the Psalms alone, e.g. 105:8, 106:45, 111:5), but also with the patriarchs (Noah – Gen 8:1, 9:15-17; Abraham – Gen 19:29, Exod 32:13, Deut 9:27; David – 2 Chr 6:42). See H. Eising. "זָכַר, zākhar," *TDOT* 4: 70: "The fundamental

- (viii) The sentence in v. 2 (MT) can simply continue in v. 3.<sup>42</sup> It is not necessary to see v. 3 as the beginning of a new phrase (LXX and others), or to divide v. 3, so that only the first three words of v. 3a would form part of the sentence in v. 2.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the beginning of a new phrase as in the LXX, the following translation is possible, where v. 3a describes the source of praise given to “the awesome one of your name.” Verse 3b is then understood to be the actual wording of the song of the royal praise singers, the children and infants.

My translation:

(STANZA ONE)

O LORD, our Lord,

*What is the awesome one of your name* in all the earth?

- who is sung (praised) [as] your splendour above the heavens  
from the mouth of children and infants,

“You have established power for the sake of your adversaries, to silence the  
enemy and avenger.”

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bond of mutual remembrance that unites God and man leads further to the observation that the covenant idea is obviously also important in this context” (viz. of mutual remembrance – CWR). Eising discusses *zākhar* in Ps 8:5 two paragraphs before this verdict, and does not seem to include it in his remark. The hypothesis of this article, however, brings this verb into the covenantal sphere.

<sup>41</sup> The root *pqd* is attested in all the Semitic languages, within the fields of “take care of, check, appoint to office, commission, entrust, muster.” See G. André, “פִּקַּד פָּקַד,” *TDOT* 12: 50-62. The rendering of *pqd* in the LXX text with ἐπισκέπτειν was done according to a set pattern, and does not really help to identify the semantic field. See G. André, *TDOT* 12: 62. André classifies *pqd* in Ps 8:5 under “taking an interest in a person” (p. 54), but identifies five (other) passages as “commissioning (*qal* and *hip‘il*); entrusting (*hip‘il*)” (p. 55). There is no compelling reason not to classify the occurrence of this verb in Ps 8:5 in this category, with the meaning “to commission, appoint” – as covenantal representative of the Great King, over “all the earth.”

<sup>42</sup> Rashi observes this connection, and relates it to the Psalmist’s statement, “Says David: הָדַדְתִּי, ‘You have established’ the Temple as the dwelling place for Your holy presence, and it is there that You ordained that the Priests and the Levites should utter the praises of your רִצְוֹ, ‘strength.’ But who are these Priests and Levites?” [Rashi asks, and answers:] “They are merely men who were once עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים, ‘babes’ who rolled and played in filth and ‘sucklings’ whose mothers nursed them. Yet You are humble enough to desire the praises of creatures so lowly!” Quoted in Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Tehillim, A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (ArtSTS, Book 1; New York: Mesorah Publications, 1995), 123-124.

<sup>43</sup> As the NRSV and other translations have it. Also the stance of Vinzenz Hamp, “Ps 8,2b.3,” 119-120.

(STANZA TWO)

When I look at your heavens (skies), the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you established...

*What is man* that you "remember" him (as covenant partner) ,

*the son of man* that you appoint him (as your representative)?

You made him a little lower than the gods and crowned him with glory and honour.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet,

sheep and cattle, all these, and also the animals of the field, the birds of the skies and the fish of the sea that cross the paths of the sea.

(STANZA THREE)

O LORD, our Lord,

*What is the awesome one of your name* in all the earth?

**E AN ARGUMENT FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT USAGE OF LXX-PSALM 8**

In some awkward way the NT references to and quotations of Ps 8 (in 1 Cor 15:25-27, Phil 3:21, Eph 1:22, Heb 2:6-8a, and Matt 21:14-16) argue for the alternative translation, which perceive the psalm as messianic in all its parts.<sup>44</sup> The first observation is that all these are from or based on the LXX. Although the first and last parts of the psalm which are under critical observation (1-2a) are not quoted in the NT, v. 2b, part of stanza one, is quoted in Matt 21:16. The second observation is that all NT references and quotations<sup>45</sup> point towards one theological direction: the centre part of the psalm, as well as v. 2b (part of the first stanza) was understood Christologically – even if the NT author had to make unusual hermeneutical moves to prove that "man, the son of man" of Ps 8 actually refers to the Messianic King. The awkward situation is therefore that the LXX Ps 8 seems to be understood as a messianic psalm by the NT authors,

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<sup>44</sup> Øystein Lund assumed the unity of the psalm with the theme of God as King and man "as a sort of vice-royal." I do not share his view that v. 3b is about the birth of a child as expression of YHWH's creation power, but agree with his overall assumption. See Øystein Lund, "From the Mouth of Babes and Infants you have Established Strength," *ScJOT* 11/1 (1997): 90.

<sup>45</sup> For an in depth discussion on the Pauline use of the Psalm (in 1 Cor 15:25-27, Phil 3:21, Eph 1:22, even Pauline citations in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians 2:1), Heb 2:6-8a, and Matt 21:14-16, see Hans Klein, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte von Psalm 8," in *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Klaus Baltzer zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Rüdiger Bartelmus, Thomas Krüger and Helmut Utzschneider; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 183-198.

while the LXX verses that speak of the Lord's wonderful name instead of the wonderful one of his name (the Messianic King), are not quoted in the NT.

Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes Ps 8:5-7 (LXX) [English 8:4-6] as an additional argument that Jesus is higher than the angels (only for a short while he was made lower than the angels, says the Psalm). The psalm then immediately initiates the main theological line of the letter to the Hebrews: Jesus is standing in as a substitute for humanity, and thereby saving humanity. The quoted verses of the Psalm talk about "man" // "the son of man" to whom God subdued "everything." The Hebrew-writer observes that this is apparently not the case (yet), but what is already apparent is that the one "crowned with glory and honour" is Jesus (v. 9). In the subsequent passage Jesus is labelled as *ὁ ἀρχηγός* [NIV "the author (footnote: originator) of their salvation"] (v. 10), "(one) like his brothers in every way" [NIV] (v. 17, cf. v. 11), in order to be "a merciful and faithful high priest" [*ἀρχιερεὺς*], atoning for the sins of humanity. Psalm 8 is therefore used to identify Jesus with humanity ("man," "the son of man"), and humanity with Jesus. Jesus completely represents humanity, its salvation and future. The part of the psalm that is quoted, by name v. 7 [English: v. 6], makes it technically possible to label this as a messianic psalm, applied to Jesus.

In Paul's "resurrection chapter," 1 Cor 15, Ps 8:6 (LXX) [English 8:5] – the last line quoted by the Hebrew-writer – is quoted in 15:27. It is clear that Paul also uses Ps 8 as a messianic psalm referring to Jesus. He, however, argues that when the psalm says "he has put everything under his feet" (that is Jesus' feet), all enemies are meant, and by name the last enemy, death itself. And that "everything" obviously excludes God – who subdues everything under Christ's feet – and to whom Christ will eventually subdue himself, so that "God will be all in all" (v. 28).

Ephesians 1:22 also briefly quotes from the same verse of Ps 8, and continues with a statement that could be interpreted as a Christological interpretation of the rest of the psalm: "he (God) gave him (Jesus) as head [of the body, the church] over everything . . ." Psalm 8 is once more a messianic psalm applied to Jesus.<sup>46</sup>

In Matt 21:16 Jesus answers his adversaries by quoting Ps 8:3 in its LXX version, "From the mouth of children and infants you have ordained (prepared) praise" [NIV]. The context is Jesus' messianic entrance into Jerusalem and the temple (Matt 21:1-16). While Jesus healed the blind and lame, the children

<sup>46</sup> What should be noted, is that in both Hebrews, 1 Cor 15 and Eph 1, the divine "subjection of everything" under mankind of Ps 8:7 is always coupled with the divine oracle to the messianic king in Ps 110:1 (" . . . until I have subjected your enemies unto you"). Psalm 110:1 is explicitly quoted in Heb 1:13, and forms the direct background of 1 Cor 15:25 and Eph 1:20. See Michael D. Goulder, "Psalm 8 and the Son of Man," *NTS* 48/1 (2002): 22.

were shouting his praises. This caused the indignation of the chief priests and teachers of the law, who confronted Jesus on the issue. "The remarkable thing about Mt 21,16 is that here also the first part of the psalm is applied to Jesus."<sup>47</sup> Jesus applies the psalm to himself in this special manifestation of his messianic state and mission. This application is in line with my proposed interpretation of (the first part of) the psalm.<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion that may be drawn from this brief survey is that the introductory part of the psalm which is in the focus for its translation possibilities is not quoted in the NT. However, all NT quotations and references, all from the central part of the psalm, as well as v. 2b, understood the psalm as a description of the messianic king, applied to Jesus as the Christ, in relation to the community of faith.<sup>49</sup>

## F CONCLUSIVE DEDUCTION AND HYPOTHESIS

A consistent messianic reading of Ps 8, in contrast to the LXX reading of the psalm, seems – as argued – the best solution to the textual and linguistic problems inherent in the latter reading. In addition, compared to the way in which the NT (selectively) uses the psalm for its messianic reading, the following scenario could be a theoretical probability:

The attempted understanding of the psalm as messianic in its entirety could have had a pre-Christian tradition which was taken up by the early church and affirmed, over against the reading tradition expressed by the Septuagint and its later disciples. The fact that the early church stressed the messianic interpretation of the psalm, but simultaneously consistently and inexplicably resisted quoting one of the most well-known and beloved words in the psalter (8:1) could be well explained in a polemic situation. Could it be that the LXX in this specific phrase was a dilemma for the witness of the church over against the synagogue, in the same way as the LXX had become

<sup>47</sup> Wim J. C. Weren, "Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem: Mt 21,1-17 in the Light of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint," in *Scriptures in the Gospels* (ed. Christopher M. Tuckett; Louvain: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 1997), 138.

<sup>48</sup> Weren is correct that Jesus declares himself to be the object of the song of the babes and infants, but gives no theological rationale for his observation. See Weren, "Jesus' Entry," 138.

<sup>49</sup> The (restored) temple community in Matthew; the church in 1 Corinthians; Ephesians as the "body of the head"; the church in Hebrews as new covenant community. Klein, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte," 198 notes that the NT did not interpret Ps 8 merely anthropologically as in the OT and Judaism, but in relation to Christ. In close connection with Ps 110:1 (in Paul and Hebrews), v. 7b of the psalm proclaims the heavenly enthronement of Christ. According to Matthew, Ps 8:3 proclaims that the children are affirming the exalted state of the "Son of David" (a clear Messianic reference).

problematic for Judaism in relation to other "Christian" texts?<sup>50</sup> The introductory phrase of the psalm as understood by the LXX was most probably a popular liturgical text, but as doctrine it presented arguments for those who could use it to "prove" that these words were actually about the wonder of God's Name, and not about God's earthly Representative. Within such a situation where the LXX interpretation had for some time won the day and the (proposed) messianic interpretation of the introduction was long lost, it is conceivable that the church made use of the Psalm for its witness of the Messiah by leaving out the controversial and "embarrassing" introductory vv. 1-2a. As the arguments for a messianic interpretation could no longer be supported by the text used by the early church (LXX Ps 8:1-2a), a Christological reading of (the rest of) the psalm had to be supported from outside the text, primarily from Ps 110. This, however, could have been a rather unconvincing argument for those who failed to read Jesus of Nazareth as אֲדִיר שָׁם יְהוָה. It is any one's guess how history could have turned out if the Jewish community of all persuasions would have read their original Scriptures together with inquisitive eyes, and were in a position at that crucial stage to see the quest for the Messiah in מְהֵרָה אֲדִיר שָׁמָּה.

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<sup>50</sup> Ἡ παρθένος ("virgin") in Isa 7:14 = Matt 1:23 for עלמה (young woman) is a famous example of doctrinal tensions. See Moshe Simon-Shoshan, "The Task of the Translators: The Rabbis, the Septuagint and the Cultural Politics of Translation," *Prooftexts* 27 (2007): 1-39 for an assessment of the so-called Septuagint legend in Rabbinic sources, which shows the tension between acceptance of the LXX (especially in its early stages), and the opposition against this translation (especially from the 3rd century onward).

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