

The Book of Psalms is a book of poetry, which was used as the “prayer” of “service” book in the ancient Israelite Temple. Composed of 150 poems, Rev. Eugene Peterson writes that, they form are a “prayer book that gives us a language adequate for responding to the God who speaks to us.” They can teach us how to pray. Psalm 108 is a prayer of orientation and reorientation celebrated the transcendent power and person of God, who cannot be put into a box, and yet who paradoxically chooses to need us, to make us responsible with God in the ongoing work of creation. It seems to be compiled from two other Psalms: as Ps 108:2–6 are virtually the same as Ps 57:8–12; and Ps 108:7–14 are the same as Ps 60:7–14.

Noted Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests (in his book *Praying the Psalms*) that as human beings we regularly find ourselves in one of three places:

1. a place of orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives;
2. a place of disorientation, in which we feel we have sunk into the pit; and
3. a place of new orientation, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place full of gratitude and awareness about our lives and our God.

Using these three “places,” Brueggemann suggests that life has a rhythm as we move from one place to the next. He believes that that psalms match those places and the surprisingly painful and joyful moves we make. In short, there are psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. Recognizing that different psalms match these three places in our lives can help us identify psalms that fit our personal lives and which may provide us with the language we need to pray and live from a place of faith, whether we are in the pit, or in a “welcome place.”

**[יהוה] LORD | Yahew** :: In the Hebrew Bible God’s personal name is the most often used noun. It occurs over 6,800 times. In Hebrew texts it is spelled only with consonants: Y-H-V-H, and it is called the “Four-Letter” name or Tetragrammaton in Greek. It’s hard to perfectly translate, as it can mean “I am who I will be” or “I will be who I am” or “I was who I am becoming”

In the ancient world of the Bible, names had meaning. Some names depicted the wish of parents (or of God) for a child to fulfill a certain destiny. Or a name could describe a child’s hoped-for character. Or if in later life he did not live up to his character name, he might be renamed. Sometimes God renamed people. We have Abram/Abraham, Jacob/Israel, Jedidiah/Solomon.

God’s personal name — YHWH — can be defined etymologically or grammatically. Hebrew linguists believe yhvh is a form of the verb havah, meaning “to be or become.” Specifically, many linguists say yhvh is a Qal imperfect third masculine singular. Following normal Hebrew grammar patterns, the vowels “a” and “e” would be added to these consonants, giving us the word “YaHVeH.” Curiously God reveals the divine name in the 1<sup>st</sup> person to Moses at the burning bush episode in Exodus 3:14-15, yet then commands that one talk of him in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. The name doesn’t follow or fit into grammatical rules and limits. Grammatical analysis, however, doesn’t lift the veil much on the mystery of the Creator’s name.

Yet for the One who forbids all static images of himself, the idea that he will be or become what he wants to be — that he is more like wind and fire than frozen images in stone or gold — the vagueness of his Name is appropriate.

God’s name is not a magic amulet that must be pronounced correctly in order to conjure him or to persuade him to hear one’s prayers. God’s name conveys

## SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 7.23.2017

### Psalm 8

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

To the leader: according to The Gittith.

A Psalm of David.

- <sup>1</sup> O **LORD**, [יהוה] our Sovereign,  
how majestic is **your name** in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- <sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your  
foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
- <sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have  
established;  
<sup>4</sup> what are human beings  
that you are mindful of them,  
**mortals** that you care for them?
- <sup>5</sup> Yet you have made them A LITTLE LOWER THAN  
God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.
- <sup>6</sup> You have given them ~~dominion~~  
works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
<sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
<sup>8</sup> the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- <sup>9</sup> O **LORD**, [יהוה] our Sovereign,  
how majestic is **your name** in all the earth!

his character, the essence of his person. It says something about who God is. When God explains his name to Moses on Mount Sinai, he doesn't expound on Hebrew grammar but reveals character: "YHVH passed by in front of him and proclaimed: YHVH, YHVH — a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in unchanging love and faithfulness, who guards unchanging love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin; yet who will not leave the guilty unpunished." —Exodus 34:6-7. God's self-revealed name is here woven into the covenant which God made with Israel. "YHVH—He will be: always himself, always righteous, always holy, always loyal to those who keep his covenant. "This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations" - Exodus 3:15). The Name is always linked to what God is doing for the people within their covenant relationship. "YHVH" could be called God's Covenant Name, for YHVH is the "Guardian of Covenant Love" (Exodus 36:7).

**your name** :: In Judaism, **יְהוָה** or "HaShem" (lit. "the name") is used to refer to God, when avoiding God's more formal title, Adonai (lit. "My Master"). HaShem is the Hebrew word which many pious Jews use instead of the **יְהוָה**—YHVH name, in casual conversations, and literally means The Name. When they encounter this name during prayers or when reading from the Torah, they visualize **יְהוָה** and say Adonai (meaning "LORD"). HaShem is used 7484 times in the Tanach [the Hebrew Scriptures]

**dominion** :: in Hebrew meaning: "authority, "dominion", "to govern", or "to rule". It contains a notion of stewardship and responsibility more than merely power over something/someone, or to enslave/control/dominate. It refers most famously back to Genesis 1:28: God's vocation to the newly created humans to care for the created order: "Be fruitful and have children, filling the earth with your life so that you can have power to fight against everything in it that leads to death. Rule with care and fairness over the natural world, over the myriads of My beautiful creatures – from tropical fish to soaring eagles to dogs and cats – every creature that is a part of this living world." – Genesis 1:28 (translation by Christopher Brown)

What is the kind of rule that God doesn't want? Ezekiel 34:4 gives us an example. In a tirade against Israel's kings, God says through the prophet, "You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them."

The dominion that God desires is one that protects the defenseless and gives justice to the oppressed. Applying this to the command for humanity to exercise dominion over creation, we can see that while we rule over creation, we're called to protect it. As a king accepts tribute or taxes from his subjects, so too we receive a bountiful sustenance from the fruits of creation. Yet also as a king should take care of the weak and poor in his kingdom, so too we are called to guard natural beauty, preserve endangered species of God's creatures, and even to restore the places which we have too often ruled "with force and harshness."

## Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

**\*What strikes or shimmers for you in this passage?**

**\*When have you heard this psalm before? What do you think the Psalm is saying? If it's a prayer/poem book for the people of Israel as they come to worship, what truth, hope or belief it is affirming? Is it a message intended for someone who finds themselves in "a pit" or someone who finds themselves in "a welcome place"? What words or images in the poem-prayer do you use in your own prayer life, whether spoken aloud or imagined in your imagination?**

**\*How does this psalm feed your soul?**

## **Related Scriptures invoked by Psalm 108 include:**

the vocation of humanity  
<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.  
<sup>28</sup> 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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." - Genesis 1:27-28

As well as the song of praise of the paradoxical person of Christ

<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was[a] in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."  
 - Philippians 2:4-7

***What other scriptures do the words of Psalm 108 recall to your mind?***