Psalm 8
A New Translation

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The translation offered below is designed to enhance appreciation of the poetry and prosody of the underlying Hebrew text. Unobtrusive differences in the use of blank spacing define stress units, versets, lines, strophes, and stanzas. An introduction to the building blocks of ancient Hebrew verse is offered elsewhere.¹

Even if one possesses little or no knowledge of Hebrew, the translation may prove helpful in getting a sense of how ancient Hebrew poetry works. A single dominant accent is signaled by grouping words in translation, and serves to point to underlying prosodic units in the Hebrew. Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation are intentional. Capitalization marks the onset of a strophe as defined in the general rule, except when enjambment occurs across strophic boundaries.

The goal has been to furnish a global approximation of the poetry and prosody of the Hebrew text, even if the results are necessarily piecemeal. The rich texture of the original cannot be mapped onto a translation except in fits and starts. I sometimes retain, in imitation of the Hebrew, examples of enallage, chiasm, ellipsis, and inversion which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering.

The translation I offer is indebted to many preexisting translations. That of David Curzon deserves particular mention (see “Ancient Hebrew Poetry in Translation,” www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com).

¹ See the present writer’s supporting essays at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com, beginning with “Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview.”
Yahweh our Lord
how magnificent is your name
in all the earth
you whose splendor upon the heavens
inspires song
by mouth of babe and suckling
you founded a fort
before your foes
putting to rest upstart and enemy

When I witness your heavens
the work of your fingers
the moon and stars
that you set in place

What are mortals
that you mind them
children of dust
that you note them

Yet you made them little less than divine
with glory and honor adorned them
you gave them reign over your hands’ work
you set all
beneath their feet

All cattle large and small
beasts of the wild as well
fowl of heaven
fish of the sea
passing over the paths of the sea

Yahweh our Lord
how magnificent is your name
in all the earth