

Psalm 138ⁱⁱⁱ

¹I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; *
before the gods I will sing your praise.

²I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, *
because of your love and faithfulness;

³For you have glorified your Name *
and your word above all things.

⁴When I called, you answered me; *
you increased my strength within me.

⁵All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, *
when they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁶They will sing of the ways of the LORD, *
that great is the glory of the LORD.

⁷Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; *
he perceives the haughty from afar.

⁸Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; *
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand
shall save me.

⁹The LORD will make good his purpose for me; *
O LORD, your love endures for ever; do not abandon the works of your
hands.

ⁱⁱⁱ About Psalm 138

This psalm of thanksgiving has many parallels with the later parts of Isaiah, and was probably written sometime after the return from exile. The “gods” of verse 1 may be the members of the heavenly council or the rulers and gods of other nations. Verses 1-4 give praise for the Lord’s help, and verses 5-7 describe the effect of God’s majesty and mercy upon the kings of the earth. The psalm concludes with an expression of the psalmist’s trust that God will personally care for him. Although all creation is under God’s care, the Lord’s intimate love is available to each individual.

There is a clear understanding expressed in this Psalm of the immanent Presence of God who is altogether transcendent to us. These opposites are not incompatible. The transcendence of God is present in the form of immanence that the human soul can know.

As for the message applicability in this set of readings, The transcendent God was clearly forgotten. Folks had put all their faith in what they could see, a human who could promise well being for all. The prophet/judge/leader was aging and had no suitable heirs. The point they missed was the immanent force of God being enjoyed through Samuel. They wanted a king, like every other nation had. Little did the people understand that God's promise comes only through God's presence; the title of "king" does not necessarily make that so. They got Saul, who help them separate themselves from God, their sin.

Bottom line, this psalm, this thought came much later than the Samuel narrative; otherwise the story would have been different. Perhaps the psalm reflects a lesson learned.