

All on You

Psalm 86:5-10

Pierre Cannings, Ph.D

I. Only You v. 5

- a. Lord
 - i. Good- **pleasant, desirable**
 - 1. good - with which Y^{HWH} is predicated to be a God who wills salvation and supports life
 - 2.
 - ii. Ready to Forgive
 - 1. taking away iniquity, transgression, and sin”
 - 2. That he is “ready to forgive” means that he remains the God who wills salvation, despite all sin
 - 3.
 - iii. Abundant in Lovingkindness
 - 1. Lovingkindness - abounding in faithfulness
 - a. Yahweh is described as “good and forgiving” (or, “ready to forgive”) with abundant love and loyalty for those who are loyal to him
 - 2. Who Call
 - a. The speaker does not doubt the ability of Yahweh to deal with the distress expressed in the supplications: “The problem is making it Yahweh’s concern, in order to mobilize God’s mercy and God’s power”
 - b. be gracious to me” (v. 3a) asks that Y^{HWH}, as “Lord,” may grant the petitioner, as his “servant,” a concrete demonstration of favor, giving out of the greatheartedness that corresponds to his inmost nature,
 - c. consequence that his love is simply inexhaustible, both in its intensity and in its extent
 - d. This verse gives the reason for the psalmist’s prayer in v. 4, as he expresses his trust in the Lord in words that will be expanded in vv. 8–10. Citing the words of the Lord’s self-revelation to Moses in Exod 34:6

II. Call on You vs 6-7

- a. To My Prayer
 - i. Prayer- in individual lamentations
 - ii. Give Ear - to **heed something**

- 1.
- b. To My Supplications
 - i. Supplications – **pleading**, the expressions of a mind beset with terror which do not have established formulations
 - ii. Give Heed - to **listen attentively**
- c. In My Troubles
 - i. Troubles –**need, distress, anxiety** (the opposite of deliverance, salvation)
 1. in my times of trouble,” but it may be that the more literal “in the day of my distress” should be understood
 2. The Lord has made himself known as the God who is kind to people like the psalmist who call on him. Knowing that the Lord has acted toward his people throughout history as he had revealed himself to be, the psalmist is emboldened to turn to him in his time of need.
 3. In referring to “the day of my distress” the psalmist uses a stylized expression (*bəyôm šārâ*, “day of distress”) found eleven times in the O (Te.g., Pss 20:1[2]; 50:15; and 77:2[3]).
 - 4.
 - ii. I will Call
 - iii. You will Answer
 1. Answer- *apokrínomai* means “to reply” to a request or a question
 2. expressing confidence in Yahweh’s capacity to deal with times of distress; vv 7 and 5 bracket the intense appeal to Yahweh in v 6

III. You Alone vs. 8-10

- a. Uncomparable
 - i. No One Like You
 1. Among the gods
 - a. first, vv 8–10, sets forth the incomparable nature of the lordship of Yahweh, using language found in other contexts as well (e.g., on v 8, see Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; Ps 35:10; for v 9, see Isa 2:3–4; 66:18–19; Zech 14:9, 16; 2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Neh 9:6; Jer 16:19, Tob 13:11; 14:6; Pss 66:4; 22:28–29; for v 10, see Pss 72:18; 77:14–15; 83:19.
 - b. The praise for the Lord’s greatness in vv. 8–10 functions as a typical confession of trust in this lament psalm. The Lord is in a class all his own in who he is and in what he does. From ancient times humans have devised all sorts of gods, but their purported deities do not in fact exist (cf.
 - ii. Nor are their works
 1. Israel’s classic tradition of liturgy and hymnody continued to speak about the radical freedom of God and the disjunctive character of

Yahweh's way over-against and distinct from every presumed world"

2. Indeed, Yahweh is without a peer among the gods, and he cannot be confined within the parameters of normal life. He is the "Worker of Wondrous Impossibilities," the one who gives hope to the hopeless, and the one who destroys the pretensions of those who think themselves secure from judgment
3. *Works* probably mean here the things God has made, rather than the deeds he has done (which come later, 10a).
4. incomparability with an abbreviated reference to his "works" in creating and sustaining the world. That here, in the first place, Y_{HWH}'s cosmic-universal activity is addressed is suggested on the one hand by the explicit reference to "the gods," who must be the gods of the nations

b. All will know

i. All Nations

1. Come and Worship

a. Worship

- i. to bow down, to fall down, Expression of reverence and adoration of God
- ii. If the form of worship changed with times and situations, its heart and center did not
- iii. The horizontal dimension is indicated by the idea that all nations will come together and kneel in adoration before Y_{HWH}
- iv. Unlike the tribal gods of the AN¹E cultures, Yahweh the God of Israel is Lord over all of the nations. The psalmist anticipates the pilgrimage of the nations to worship before the Lord, in contrast to their present worship of their false deities (v. 8). Even the arrogant enemies who are afflicting the psalmist (v. 14) will have to fall to their knees before the Lord someday (cf. Isa 66:18–23; Zech 14:16; Rev 15:4).

2. Glorify you name

a. Glorify- to honor God

c. You are Great

i. Great

1.

ii. Wonderous

1. Wonderous

2. Deeds - **miraculous acts** —a. performed by God

¹ANE Ancient Near East(ern)

- a. *Wondrous things*, variously translated in the Psalms, is a frequent term for God's miracles of salvation.
- b. Yahweh is declared to be a "Worker of Wonders," one who does acts of deliverance and salvation which lie beyond human powers (cf. Ps 9:2).
- c. The wonders that the Lord performs point to the glorious God that he is, because his greatness is evidenced by his mighty deeds.
- d.

iii. Alone are God

1. The space in which the relationship of the petitioner to his God is now located is the entire cosmos, illuminated both vertically and horizontally. The vertical perception begins in the heavenly world of the gods above
2. Thus in its central section the psalm constructs a mighty stage on which it localizes the salvation implored by the petitioner, in order then to be able to describe its significance as the revealing of the unique God, YHWH, and thus at the same time to depict the utterly inconceivable event—if *this* God were to turn his attention to a single human being, giving help and consolation (without this person having a prominent social status—quite the contrary!).

Yahweh is declared to be a “Worker of Wonders,” one who does acts of deliverance and salvation which lie beyond human powers (cf. Ps 9:2).

Word Studies

Good - **pleasant, desirable**

Ready to Forgive- taking away iniquity, transgression, and sin”)²

Abundant Lovingkindness- abounding in faithfulness

Give Ear - to **heed something**

Prayer- in individual lamentations³

Heed - to **listen attentively**

Supplications - **pleading** , the expressions of a mind beset with terror which do not have established formulations⁴

Trouble **need, distress, anxiety** (the opposite of deliverance, salvation⁵

Answer *apokrínomai* means “to reply” to a request or a question⁶

Worship - to bow down, to fall down, Expression of reverence and adoration of God⁷If the form of worship changed with times and situations, its heart and center did not⁸

² John S. Kselman, “[Forgiveness: Old Testament.](#)” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 832.

³ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1777.

⁴ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1719.

⁵ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1053.

⁶ Allen C. Myers, [The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 59.

⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Worship.](#)” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2164.

⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Worship.](#)” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2164.

Glorify – to honor God

Great

Wonderous

Deeds- **miraculous acts** (תִּלְפָּזִי see Stolz ZTh⁹K 69 (1972) 137f): —a. performed by God¹⁰

⁹ZThK Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 927.

Commentary Studies

The speaker does not doubt the ability of Yahweh to deal with the distress expressed in the supplications: “The problem is making it Yahweh’s concern, in order to mobilize God’s mercy and God’s power” (Brueggemann, 62). Yahweh is described as “good and forgiving” (or, “ready to forgive”) with abundant love and loyalty for those who are loyal to him (v 5). The adjective סלח (“forgiving”) does not appear elsewhere in M¹¹T, but the verb סלח is fairly common, with God (or the action of God) always as the subject (Anderson, II, 615; cf. Pss 25:11; 103:3; Jer 31:34; 50:20; 2 Chr 7:14). The expression “abounding in loyal-love” (רַב־חַסֵּד) also occurs in v 15 in the form רַב־חַסֵּד וְאֵמֶת. V 7 corresponds to v 5 in expressing confidence in Yahweh’s capacity to deal with times of distress; vv 7 and 5 bracket the intense appeal to Yahweh in v 6 (for v 6, cf. Pss 5:2; 28:2; 130:2; for v 7a, cf., e.g., Pss 20:2; 77:3; for 7b, see 17:6; perhaps אל [“O God”] is missing from 86:7b or is understood, but cf. Dahood, II, 294). I have read the בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי in a general collective sense: “in my times of trouble,” but it may be that the more literal “in the day of my distress” should be understood, as, e.g., Kraus (II, 763) who thinks of a situation at a sanctuary in which the speaker appears with his enemies before God and expects an oracle of vindication and deliverance from God (cf. Pss 20:2; 50:15), or at least with the expectation of some sign or favorable omen (cf. Schmidt, 162–63; Leslie, 383–84). The present psalm, however, has probably lost the immediacy of direct cultic relatedness and is more generalized.¹²

Affirmation of the incomparable sovereignty of Yahweh (86:8–13). These verses, which form the core of the psalm, are really in two parts. The first, vv 8–10, sets forth the incomparable nature of the lordship of Yahweh, using language found in other contexts as well (e.g., on v 8, see Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; Ps 35:10; for v 9, see Isa 2:3–4; 66:18–19; Zech 14:9, 16; 2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Neh 9:6; Jer 16:19; Tob 13:11; 14:6; Pss 66:4; 22:28–29; for v 10, see Pss 72:18; 77:14–15; 83:19. Yahweh is declared to be a “Worker of Wonders,” one who does acts of deliverance and salvation which lie beyond human powers (cf. Ps 9:2). Brueggemann (*The Message of the Psalms*, 63; “‘Impossibility’ and Epistemology in the Faith Tradition of Abraham and Sarah [Gen 18:1–15],” *ZA*¹³ 94 [1982] 615–34) proposes to translate נִפְלְאוֹת (“wonders”) as “impossibilities,” arguing for a faith tradition involving the word פִּלְא especially manifest in Gen 18:1–15, Judg 13:1–20, and Jer 32:16–35, and reflected in numerous references in the Psalms (e.g., 72:18; 78:4, 11, 12, 32; 96:3; 98:1; 111:4; 139:14; 145:5; also 105:2, 5; 106:7, 22; 107:8, 15, 21, 24, 31; 136:4). He contends that the varied usages of פִּלְא point to acts of God, or

¹¹MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

¹² Marvin E. Tate, [*Psalms 51–100*](#), vol. 20, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 381.

¹³*ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

potential acts, which “challenge accepted definitions of reality” (ZA¹⁴W 94 [1982] 620). The “impossibility” may be of two kinds (as in Jer 32:17, 27): that which causes endings to what is valued and that which brings unexpected and unanticipated newness. In general, the usage of אִלֶּלֶּ language refers to “the inversions and discontinuities by which something emerges in historical experience for which there was no ground of expectation” (ZA¹⁵W 94 [1982] 623). Brueggemann does not doubt that in more “standardized liturgic uses” some of the concreteness, intensity, and sharpness of usage in narratives like Gen 18:1–15 are lost. But it is important that “Israel’s classic tradition of liturgy and hymnody continued to speak about the radical freedom of God and the disjunctive character of Yahweh’s way over-against and distinct from every presumed world” (622). Indeed, Yahweh is without a peer among the gods, and he cannot be confined within the parameters of normal life. He is the “Worker of Wondrous Impossibilities,” the one who gives hope to the hopeless, and the one who destroys the pretensions of those who think themselves secure from judgment.¹⁶

¹⁴ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

¹⁵ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

¹⁶ Marvin E. Tate, [Psalms 51–100](#), vol. 20, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 381–382.

expect the strength and fulfillment of my life.¹⁷⁵ Correspondingly, the imperative at the beginning of the subsection, יִנְנֵי, “be gracious to me” (v. 3a^{18*}), asks that Y_{HWH}, as “Lord,” may grant the petitioner, as his “servant,” a concrete demonstration of favor, giving out of the greatheartedness that corresponds to his inmost nature, as the positively hymnic reasoning in v. 5^{19*} insists.

Here three characteristics or ways of working proper to Y_{HWH} are named; the petitioner reminds God of them in order to move him to a saving intervention. (a) That God is טוב, “good,” became a “short formula” in (postexilic) theology and liturgy, with which Y_{HWH} is predicated to be a God who wills salvation and supports life.²⁰⁶ (b) That he is “ready to forgive”²¹⁷ means that he remains the God who wills salvation, despite all sin (cf. the reference, through סָלַח, “forgive,” to Exod 34:9^{22*}), and who will, of himself, rebuild the ruined ways of salvation. (c) That he is רַב דָּוָן, “rich in steadfast love,”²³⁸ has as its consequence that his love is simply inexhaustible, both in its intensity and in its extent. All three statements, which can be read as an ascending series, emphasize Y_{HWH}’s *personal* godhead. He is fundamentally a God who is devoted to his people, full of concern and generosity, and to every individual as well: “all who call on him” (v. 5b^{24*}). That is the basic statement the petitioner holds up before his God, with the silent argument: if you are so infinitely good to *all* who call to you for help, how much more will (must) you show your graciousness to me, your servant, who call to you “all day long.”²⁵⁹

■ 6–7^{26*} The third subsection, vv. 6–7^{27*}, with the two nouns “my prayer” (תַּפִּלְתִּי) and “my supplications” (תַּחֲנוּנוֹתַי), summarizes the preceding petitions. These nouns underscore that the

¹⁷⁵ For this meaning of the expression cf. esp. 24:4*.

^{18*} ³ be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long.

Psalm 86:3 (NRSV)

^{19*} ⁵ For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Psalm 86:5 (NRSV)

²⁰⁶ Cf. the liturgical refrain “give thanks/praise to Y_{HWH}, for he is good”: 100:5*; 106:1*; 107:1*; 118:1*, 29*; 136:1*.

²¹⁷ נָלוּ, as a verbal adjective, is singular; ordinarily we find the finite verb, but the adjective emphasizes that what is meant is this readiness to forgive as a fundamental and essential feature of Y_{HWH}.

^{22*} ⁹ He said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

Exodus 34:9 (NRSV)

²³⁸ A quotation from the so-called formula of grace or Sinai covenant formula in Exod 34:6–7*; see below.

^{24*} ⁵ For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Psalm 86:5 (NRSV)

²⁵⁹ Vv. 3b* and 7a* are mutually related by the key phrase “call to you.”

^{26*} ⁶ Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.

⁷ In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

Psalm 86:6–7 (NRSV)

^{27*} ⁶ Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.

⁷ In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

Psalm 86:6–7 (NRSV)

servant's trust is unbroken, for there is neither reproach nor accusation, such as is otherwise the case in psalms of lament. The reserve of our psalm corresponds on the one hand to the servant–lord relationship that shapes the psalm; on the other hand we also find expressed here the trust and assurance of being heard that fill the petitioner. That it cannot be a matter of indifference to the “Lord” Y_{HWH} when his “servant” is in trouble—therein lies precisely the uniqueness of Y_{HWH} in contrast to the gods of the nations (cf. also Psalm 82), as the second section of the psalm immediately reveals.

■ **8–13**^{28*} Beginning at v. 8^{29*} space and time broaden, marking the border of the second section (vv. 8–13^{30*}). The space in which the relationship of the petitioner to his God is now located is the entire cosmos, illuminated both vertically and horizontally. The vertical perception begins in the heavenly world of the gods above (v. 8^{31*}) and closes with a look into the nethermost underworld (v. 13^{32*}). The horizontal dimension is indicated by the idea that all nations will come together and kneel in adoration before Y_{HWH}. In the background is the common ancient Near Eastern motif of the homage of the nations, in its Israelite version the pilgrimage of nations to Zion as the place of Y_{HWH}'s throne.¹³³⁰ It is true that in this psalm Zion is not directly mentioned, but the Zion perspective is implicitly presumed by the formula “they will come/go in.” The Zion perspective is particularly unmistakable in the neighboring Psalms

^{28*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

¹² I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

¹³ For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Psalm 86:8–13 (NRSV)

^{29*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)

^{30*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

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Psalm 86:8–13 (NRSV)

^{31*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)

^{32*} ¹³ For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Psalm 86:13 (NRSV)

³³¹⁰ Cf. Isa 2:1–5* = Mic 4:1–5*; Isa 25:6–7*; 60; 66:18–19*; Hag 2:1–9*; Zech 8:20–22*; 14:16–19*; Tob 13:9–13*.

84–85 and 87, and must at least be kept in mind in a contextual reading of Psalm 86; Psalm 25, incorporated into Psalm 86 (see above), is also infused with Zion theology. The time horizon of Psalm 86 is also broadly conceived, as v. 12b^{34*} brings in the “perspective of eternity.” Thus in its central section the psalm constructs a mighty stage on which it localizes the salvation implored by the petitioner, in order then to be able to describe its significance as the revealing of the unique God, YHWH, and thus at the same time to depict the utterly inconceivable event—if *this* God were to turn his attention to a single human being, giving help and consolation (without this person having a prominent social status—quite the contrary!).

■ **8–9^{35*}** The uniqueness of this event has to do, in the first place, with the uniqueness of YHWH himself, as v. 8^{36*} emphasizes in two hymnic nominal clauses, which celebrate YHWH’s incomparability with an abbreviated reference to his “works” in creating and sustaining the world. That here, in the first place, YHWH’s cosmic–universal activity is addressed is suggested on the one hand by the explicit reference to “the gods,” who must be the gods of the nations (and not the “strange gods” worshiped by Israel). But the intertextually relevant reference texts also place YHWH’s activity in the horizon of the world of the nations.¹³⁷¹ When the Hebrew root עש, “make/ work,” which is used to refer to YHWH’s “works” in v. 8^{38*}, is repeated in v. 9^{39*} in order to describe “all nations” as the “works” of YHWH, the psalm is subtly insinuating the (eschatological) notion that the nations will turn to YHWH as the Lord of their history, too, and as the only true God. Thus the act of *proskynesis* may mean not only homage, but also subjection to his rule.¹⁴⁰²

■ **10^{41*}** It is difficult to determine who, in v. 10^{42*}, is the speaker of the hymnic confession introduced by כִּי, “for, indeed/yes.” On the one hand, it seems most likely that the individual who prays the psalm now summarizes vv. 9–10^{43*}: YHWH’s “greatness” is shown most particularly

^{34*} ¹² I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

Psalm 86:12 (NRSV)

^{35*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Psalm 86:8–9 (NRSV)

^{36*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)

³⁷¹¹ Cf. esp. Exod 15:11–12*; Pss 89:7–14*; 95:3–5*; 96:4–5*; and frequently.

^{38*} ⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)

^{39*} ⁹ All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Psalm 86:9 (NRSV)

⁴⁰¹² Cf. 22:28–30*; 66:3–4*; 96:7–9*; 100:1–3*; 102:23*.

^{41*} ¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Psalm 86:10 (NRSV)

^{42*} ¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Psalm 86:10 (NRSV)

^{43*} ⁹ All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

in a comparison with the gods (cf. v. 8a^{44*}), and his wondrous working, which evokes astonishment and fear,¹⁴⁵³ is shown in and through his “works” (cf. v. 8b^{46*}). And that YHWH *alone* is truly “God” is not mere theory, but can literally be experienced if all the nations will turn away from the gods whom they have served heretofore, in order to give honor to YHWH alone (cf. v. 10^{47*}). On the other hand, it is not impossible that v. 10^{48*} is intended as the speech of the nations when they come to revere YHWH (cf. 83:19^{49*}; 126:2^{50*}; 138:5–6^{51*}).⁵²

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- 44* 8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. Psalm 86:9–10 (NRSV)
- 45¹³ Cf. Exod 15:11–15*; 34:10*; Pss 96:3*; 98:3*; 145:5*.
- 46* 8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)
- 47* 10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Psalm 86:8 (NRSV)
- 48* 10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Psalm 86:10 (NRSV)
- 49* 18 Let them know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth. Psalm 86:10 (NRSV)
- 50* 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” Psalm 83:18 (NRSV)
- 51* 5 They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. Psalm 126:2 (NRSV)
- 6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. Psalm 138:5–6 (NRSV)
- ⁵² Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, [*Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*](#), ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 372–373.

Praise for power (86:6–13)

86:6–10. David repeated his call for the **LORD** to **hear** him. His confidence that **in his trouble** God would **answer** him was strengthened by his knowledge that the Lord is incomparable (**there is none like You**; cf. Ex. 15:11), fully able to do what he asked (**no deeds can compare with Yours**). People from **all ... nations** will serve Him, and He **alone** is the **great ... God**. This theme of God's incomparable greatness is also reflected in the psalm's sevenfold use of the word **Lord** (*'ădōnay*), which stresses His lordship and sovereignty (Ps. 86:3–5, 8–9, 12, 15).⁵³

86:5 This verse gives the reason for the psalmist's prayer in v. 4, as he expresses his trust in the Lord in words that will be expanded in vv. 8–10. Citing the words of the Lord's self-revelation to Moses in Exod 34:6 ("abounding in faithful love"; see also v. 15), the psalmist indicates that it is the goodness of the Lord that prompts his appeal. The Lord has made himself known as the God who is kind to people like the psalmist who call on him. Knowing that the Lord has acted toward his people throughout history as he had revealed himself to be, the psalmist is emboldened to turn to him in his time of need.

86:6 There is a sense of desperation in the psalmist's voice as he implores the Lord to help him. He begs the Lord to listen and to respond mercifully to his cry. Only the Lord can meet his need, and the psalmist is totally dependent on him. He realizes that "to pray is an act of faith in the almighty and gracious God, who responds to the prayers of his people."³⁷⁵⁴⁰

86:7 In referring to "the day of my distress" the psalmist uses a stylized expression (*bəyôm ṣārâ*, "day of distress") found eleven times in the O⁵⁵T (e.g., Pss 20:1[2]; 50:15; and 77:2[3]).³⁷⁵⁶¹

⁵³ Allen P. Ross, "[Psalms](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 856.

⁵⁴³⁷⁰ P. Verhoef, *NIDOTTE* 4:1062.

⁵⁵OT Old Testament

⁵⁶³⁷¹ VanGemeren, "Psalms," 5:558, notes that this standard expression leaves undefined the precise nature of the psalmist's affliction.

He does not attempt to work things out for himself, and he does not rely on other resources; but he is confident that the Lord will answer him, and that is why he calls out to him.

2. Praise (86:8–10)

- ⁸ **Lord, there is no one like you among the gods,
and there are no works like yours.**
- ⁹ **All the nations you have made
will come and bow down before you, Lord,
and will honor your name.**
- ¹⁰ **For you are great and perform wonders;
you alone are God.**

86:8 The praise for the Lord's greatness in vv. 8–10 functions as a typical confession of trust in this lament psalm. The Lord is in a class all his own in who he is and in what he does. From ancient times humans have devised all sorts of gods, but their purported deities do not in fact exist (cf. Pss 96:5; 135:5). But if they did, no god of human invention can match the Lord in his being or in his deeds (cf. Exod 15:11). His matchless deeds point to his matchless being, leading the psalmist to worship him (cf. Ps 139:14).

86:9 Unlike the tribal gods of the AN⁵⁷E cultures, Yahweh the God of Israel is Lord over all of the nations. The psalmist anticipates the pilgrimage of the nations to worship before the Lord, in contrast to their present worship of their false deities (v. 8). Even the arrogant enemies who are afflicting the psalmist (v. 14) will have to fall to their knees before the Lord someday (cf. Isa 66:18–23; Zech 14:16; Rev 15:4). This, then, is an O⁵⁸T foreshadowing of the N⁵⁹T teaching in Phil 2:9–11, that every knee will bow before Christ in a gesture of respect and submission before him.

86:10 The wonders that the Lord performs point to the glorious God that he is, because his greatness is evidenced by his mighty deeds. Zenger suggests that v. 10 could be construed as the words of the nations as they come to worship the Lord, or this verse could more likely continue the confession of the psalmist,³⁷⁶⁰² but in either case the Lord's singular greatness is manifested by his continuing activity in the world. The Lord is not just the best of Gods, but he alone is God—a ringing affirmation of monotheism (cf. Deut 4:35; 2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Isa 37:16, 20).⁶¹

⁵⁷ANE Ancient Near East(ern)

⁵⁸OT Old Testament

⁵⁹NT New Testament

⁶⁰³⁷² Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 373.

⁶¹ Daniel J. Estes, [Psalms 73–150](#), ed. E. Ray. Clendenen, vol. 13, *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 141–143.

4–7. As so often in the Psalms, the prayer resolutely heads toward clearer skies and firmer ground. *Gladden* (4) is a bold request at such a time, and good reasons are summoned to support it. They are given in the three clauses introduced by ‘for’; the single-mindedness of the one who is praying (4b, on which the contrasted uses of the expression ‘lift up his/my soul’ in 24:4; 25:1 make the perfect comment), the character of the Lord (5), and the conviction that he answers prayer (7b). After this, the ‘sunlit uplands’ of the next stanza are not wholly a surprise.

86:8–13. The sovereign

The word *Lord*, i.e. ‘Master’ or ‘Sovereign’ (as distinct from LORD, conventionally printed in capitals in the Bible to indicate the name Yahweh), occurs seven times in this psalm, three of them in the present stanza (8, 9, 12). To God in this capacity David now gives his full attention.

His praise is not at random: he makes comparisons first in the realm of heaven (8a) and then in those of nature (8b), mankind (9) and history (10), on all of which see the further comments below. Finally he exposes his own self to this sovereignty and its searching implications (11ff.).

8a. *The gods* may be a rhetorical expression, as if to say, ‘the gods, even supposing they existed!’ But the downright statement of 10b, *thou alone art God*, makes it more probable that in verse 8 David is speaking of angels rather than hypothetical beings: see on 8:5; also the introduction to Psalm 82.

8b. *Works* probably mean here the things God has made, rather than the deeds he has done (which come later, 10a). Cf. e.g. 8:3, 6; 19:1.

9. The prospect of the world’s homage is often clear and strong for David; cf. especially 22:27ff. Here the logic of it is brought out by the clause ‘(whom) *thou hast made*’.

10a. *Wondrous things*, variously translated in the Psalms, is a frequent term for God’s miracles of salvation. Cf. e.g. 78:4, 11, 32; see also on 9:1.

10b. On the uncompromising declaration, *thou alone art God*, see on 8a. Its proximity to that verse, which otherwise might have seemed to fall short of monotheism, is a fact to bear in mind in studying statements about ‘gods’ in other psalms.⁶²

⁶² Derek Kidner, [*Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 343–344.