

PSALM 115



GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

NOT UNTO US – August 27, 2023

I. GENRE: Mixed Song of Trust

A. Ps 115 is one of the most difficult psalms to classify.

1. Begins like a prayer of **lament** (1-2).
2. Follows with a prophetic meditation against idolatry (3-8).
3. Calls groups of people to trust God, followed by what sounds like lines from a backup choir (9-11).
4. Assures those people that God will bless them (12-16).
5. Ends with a pledge to worship God endlessly (17-18).

B. The psalm is likely a **combination** of different song pieces.

1. Parts of the song clearly sound like multiple voices are singing different parts (9-11).
2. Parts of the song appear in other songs. For instance: Ps 115:3 is expanded in 135:5-7; and 115:4-8 is mirrored in 135:15-18.

C. The dominant theme in the song is God's trustworthiness despite what some enemies interpreted as His **absence**.

II. SETTING

A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

1. The psalm is anonymous, an "orphan psalm."
2. The reference to the "house of Aaron" (10, 12) suggests that the temple is operating.

PSALM 115 © M. Scott Bashor 2023		PURPOSE: Using various phrases of lament, praise, instruction, and trust, the psalmist expresses confidence that Yahweh above will bless His people with His invisible presence & so advance His glory in the earth.	TYPE: Mixed Song of Trust with Antiphonal Voices Author: Unknown Date: Unknown. Perhaps in the post-exilic period after the re-establishment of the Temple, c. 516 BC. Collection: Pss 113-118 traditionally called the "Egyptian Hallel"
EXPECTATION OF GLORIOUS HELP FROM THE INVISIBLE GOD vv. 1-8			
Petition for Divine Intervention vv. 1-2	Confidence in God's Superiority vv. 3-8	Calls to Trust Yahweh Alone vv. 9-11	Assurances of Yahweh's Care vv. 12-16
Prayer for Help v. 1 Confession of Unworthiness v. 1a Appeal to Yahweh's Glory v. 1b Appeal to Yahweh's Faithfulness v. 1c	The Sovereignty of the Invisible God of Heaven v. 3 The Folly of Manmade Idols vv. 4-8 Foolish Fancies of Human Hands v. 4 Idols Incapable of Bringing Help vv. 5-8 Mute & Blind v. 5 Deaf & Anomalous v. 6 Impaired, Lame & Utterly Silent v. 7 Lifeless and Lifetaking v. 8	Call to All Israel v. 9 Solo Call v. 9a Choral Encouragement v. 9a Call to the Priests v. 10 Solo Call v. 10a Choral Encouragement v. 10a	Celebration of Yahweh's Covenant Faithfulness v. 12a Confidence in Yahweh's Blessing vv. 12b-13 To all Israel v. 12b To the Priests v. 12c To All God-Fearers v. 13
CONFIDENCE TO TRUST IN YAHWEH vv. 9-16			
Complaint about Enemy Taunts v. 2 The Taunters: Pagan Nations v. 2a The Taunting: God's Absence from Israel v. 2b		Call to Other God-Fearers v. 11 Solo Call v. 11a Choral Encouragement v. 11b	Encouraging Prayers for Fruitfulness & Increase vv. 14-15 Remembrance of Yahweh's Creation Ordinance & Blessing v. 16
			Believers' Pledge of Perpetual Praise v. 18 Commitment to Raise Generations Unending for Praise v. 18ab Concluding Hallelujah v. 18c

3. This psalm may have come from the days of the second temple (c. 516 BC), after the Babylonian **exile**.
 - a. V. 1 may be an adaptation of Ezekiel 36:19-23, a prophecy of restoration spoken by the prophet during the exile.
 - b. V. 2 may be an adaptation of Ps. 79:10, part of a psalm which looks back on the exile.
4. The temple was rebuilt In Ezra's day, but God never again **dwelt** with them as before. Nonetheless, the God of heaven was not absent and was still working His plan for their good.

B. PLACEMENT

1. Ps 115 is one of the main parts of a collection of psalms that came to be known as "The Egyptian Hallel."
 - a. Pss 113-118 are all songs of praise and thanks of one kind or another, often celebrating God's deliverance.
 - b. Ps 114 celebrates the exodus more explicitly than any other of the pss in this series.
 - c. Ps 115 seems to refer to be set during Israel's second exodus from captivity, the return from the Exile.
2. Some versions connect Pss 114 & 115, but the Hebrew Bible treats them as different poems (and they are very different).
3. One common theme in Pss 113-115 is Yahweh's **presence**.
 - a. With the poor and needy in Ps 113.
 - b. With Israel as His presence shook everything in Ps 114.
 - c. With Israel though His presence is invisible in Ps 115.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- A. **Unworthy of Help:** The opening line (1) expresses the truth that Israel wasn't worthy of God's help. In fact, she was deserving of judgment. But the **glory** of God's grace is appealed to.
- B. **Ironies:** The world around Israel thought they were so foolish and powerless, but the truth was exactly opposite.
 1. The terms "does" (3) and "work" (4) are related. God does/makes what He wants, but idols are made by men.
 2. While the nations can't see the **invisible** God (2) like they can their gods (4), their gods can't see or hear or help them (5-7) like Yahweh does (9-16).
 3. While pagan gods can't even utter a sound (7c), Yahweh repeatedly blessings and helps His people (12-15).
 4. Pagans "trust" in powerless idols (8) but Israel is called to "trust" in the God who is their help and shield (9-11).
- C. **The Folly of Idols:**
 1. In vv. 4-8, the psalmist lampoons idol worship as folly. For all the appearances that idols have, they can't say or do anything—not even grunt a sound (7c). On the other hand, Yahweh is a God who speaks revelation and moves according to His word.
 2. **Idol worship** is not simply something different but something **dangerous** to those who practice it (8).
- D. **A Place for God-Fearers:** The phrase "those who fear the LORD" (11a, 12c) might refer to non-Hebrews who converted. In the NT such Gentile believers in Israel's God are called "God-fearers."
- E. **The Creator's Continued Blessing:** The language of vv. 14-16 recalls Gen 1:28 where God promised to make man fruitful and establish his place in the creation. Redemption realigns us with God's plan.
- F. **Dead to Worship:** God's people are not like the lost who end up in an eternal deadness to God (17). Instead, they enjoy fulfilling the pledge of ceaseless praise to God for His great grace.