

PSALM 135



GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

ABOVE ALL GODS

January 7, 2024

I. IMPACT

A. In Judaism

- Ps 135 was grouped with others as “The Great Hallel.” The ps is a crescendo of praise for how God delivered Israel & reigns over everything.
- Ps 135 was read at various holidays and Sabbaths.
- Virtually every verse quotes or parallels some other Scripture, so it is useful in refreshing one’s memory of things God has said and done.

B. On the Modern Reader

- Ps 135 lifts us up to think on things which are above, focusing on God’s greatness and goodness.
- It demonstrates the value of **rehearsing** what God has done so we do not forget His goodness.
- It stresses the absolute supremacy of God above all other so-called gods.

“We are enticed, through a slow & incremental process that erodes convictions, inculcates habits, & impacts priorities, to enter idolatry thru the back door. ... The gods of business do not require that we pay homage at a shrine, but they can require extreme devotion & displace priorities with lesser gods. The gods of fashion do not have holy days, but they transform the narcissistic “me” into an idol to be adorned and adored. The gods of sport give meaning & escape to my intolerably boring life. Idolatry in our culture is a far greater concern than we often acknowledge.” – Douglas Webster

II. GENRE: Song of Corporate Praise

- Ps 135 fits the standard structure for a song of praise.
 - Opening call to praise (1-4)
 - Cause for praise (5-18)
 - Concluding call to praise (19-21)
- The concluding call to praise uses the term “bless” instead of “praise,” but these are synonyms.
- Most of this corporate refers to worshippers in the plural. While there is a singular (“I”) in v. 5, it is a direct quote from **Jethro’s** confession of faith.
- Ps 135 is often labeled as a “song of remembrance” because it rehearses Israel’s redemption (vv. 8-14). That said, remembrance is more of a feature found in different kinds of songs, not a genre of song.

III. SETTING

A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

- The psalm is anonymous, an “orphan psalm.”
- The references to priests & Levites & God’s dwelling in Zion (19-21) mean the **temple** was operating.
- Because every verse recycles phrases from other portions of Scripture, many believe Ps 135 was written during the 2nd Temple period (after 516 BC).
 - Verse 21 speaks of God’s dwelling in Zion, which sounds like the 1st Temple period.
 - But the 2nd Temple was still God’s earthly home even though the Shekinah never returned. Ezra 6:12; 7:14; Neh. 1:9.

B. PLACEMENT

- Pss 135 & 136 are twins, sharing many lines. They create a collection called “The Great Hallel” because they rehearse God’s dealings in Israel thru history.
- These 2 pss follow the Pilgrim Psalter (Pss 120-134), songs used for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Pss 135-136 recounts Israel’s pilgrimage from Egypt into Canaan.

III. COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS

A. Mosaic of Scripture

- Ps 135 quotes from the Law, Prophets & Writings. These are not hodgepogded but built like a mosaic.

PS 135	PARALLEL WORDING (bold = strong)
v. 1	Ps 113:1
v. 2	Ps 134:1
v. 3	Pss 54:6; 66:2, 4; 68:4; 133:1; 136:1; etc.
v. 4	Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6; 14:2
v. 5	Ex 18:11a
v. 6	Ps 115:3
v. 7	Jer 10:13; 51:16
v. 8	Ex 12:29
v. 9	Ps 105:27
v. 10	Ps 136:17-18
v. 11	Ps 136:19-20
v. 12	Ps 136:21-22
v. 13	Ex 3:15; Ps 102:12
v. 14	Dt 32:36a
v. 15	Ps 115:4
v. 16	Ps 115:5
v. 17	Ps 115:6
v. 18	Ps 115:8
v. 19	Ps 115:9-10
v. 20	Ps 115:11
v. 21	Ps 134:3a

2. The most adapted passage is Psalm 115 which has 8 vv. reused here. Ps 136 has 6 of its vv. adapted. Two key quotations from the Law appear in 135:5 & 14.

B. Symmetry

1. Outer edges (1-4, 19-21)

- a. **Hallelujah** opens (1) & closes (21) the ps.
- b. **House:** Reference to Yahweh’s house (2) is mirrored by t houses of God’s people (19-20).
- c. **Praise & Bless Yahweh:** The intro (1-4) has 4 commands to “praise,” and the conclusion (19-21) has 4 commands to “bless.” The intro & conclusion each mention Yahweh 6 times.

2. Internal Sections (5-18)

- a. **God’s Supremacy (5-7, 15-18).** Vv. 5-7 celebrate God’s supremacy over all gods, and vv. 15-18 ridicule the powerlessness of idols.
- b. **Idolatry as a Connecting Theme.** It may seem at first that idolatry is only mentioned here (5) and there (15-18), but the theme connects the whole inner section.
 - (1) Yahweh’s supremacy over gods is seen in His control of nature (6-7) & history (8-14).
 - (2) Pagans believed their gods controlled nature and their nations, but God’s actions demonstrated His supremacy.

3. **Chiasm.** The movements of the ps create a chiasm, a pattern where thought advances and retreats along similar lines of expression. The color scheme in the visual outline chart highlights this.

C. **Selected Moments of History:** While this is a song of remembrance, the historical moments of deliverance which are recounted are very selective.

- 1. **The 10th Plague:** While all the plagues are mentioned in a general way (9), only the 10th plague, the most climactic, is highlighted (8).
- 2. **Transjordan Kings:** While the conquest of Canaan is mentioned in general terms (10, 11c), only the two kings on the east of Jordan are mentioned (11ab). These were the two kings defeated by Moses.

D. **God’s Memorial Name:** Yahweh’s name is referred to as a memorial—a name forever associated with the great saving works He accomplished (Exod. 3:15). What a contrast is His name with the names of the little known kings He overthrew.

PSALM 135 <small>© M. Scott Bashoor 2024</small>		PURPOSE: Using phraseology found throughout the Old Testament, the author summons Israel to praise Yahweh for His supremacy over pagan gods as evidenced by His sovereignty over creation and nations throughout redemptive history.		Type: Corporate Song of Praise Author: Unknown Date: Probably after 2 nd Temple construction, c. 516 B.C. Note: A mosaic of various verses & phrases from the Law, Prophets, & Writings. A twin to Psalm 136.	
OPENING CALLS TO PRAISE YAHWEH vv. 1-4	REASONS TO PRAISE YAHWEH: HIS ABSOLUTE SUPREMACY AND GRACIOUS FAVOR vv. 5-18				CLOSING CALLS TO BLESS YAHWEH vv. 19-21
Introductory Hallelujah v. 1a Call to Temple Workers vv. 1b-2 Transition to Central Meditation vv. 3-4 Repeated Hallelujah v. 3a Reasons for Praise: Yahweh’s Goodness & Favor vv. 3b-4	Yahweh’s Superiority Over All Gods vv. 5-7 Personal Confession of His Supremacy v. 5 Declaration of His Sovereignty Over Creation vv. 6-7	Yahweh’s Supremacy in Redemptive History vv. 8-14		The Inferiority of Manmade Gods vv. 15-18 Foolish Fancies of Human Hands v. 15 Idols Incapable of Bringing Help vv. 16-18 <i>Mute & Blind</i> v. 16 <i>Deaf & Breathless</i> v. 17 <i>Lifeless and Life-taking</i> v. 18	Call to All Israel v. 19a Call to the Priests v. 19b Call to the Levites v. 20a Call to Other God-Fearers v. 20b Climactic Blessing on Yahweh in Zion v. 21ab Closing Hallelujah v. 21c
		Remembrance of Yahweh’s Judgments vv. 8-12 Judgments on Egypt in the Exodus vv. 8-9 Judgments on Canaan in the Conquest vv. 10-12 <i>Overthrow of Kingdoms</i> vv. 10-11 <i>Possession of the Promised Land</i> v. 12	Rejoicing Over Yahweh’s Judgments vv. 13-14 Praise for Yahweh’s Glorious Reputation v. 13 Confidence in Israel’s Future Vindication v. 14		