

Psalm 135

The greatness of the Lord and the vanity of idols

Psalm 135:

A classic example of the hymn of praise, this psalm contains the three key elements: a call to praise (verses 1-3), a cause for praise (verses 4-18), and a conclusion (verses 19-21).

The reasons cited in the cause for praise are instructive in the elements of Israel's theology: because the Lord of Israel is the only true God (verses 5-7), because He is the Savior of Israel (verses 8-14), and because He is greater than worthless idols (verses 15-18).

Verses 1-21:

Palms 135 and 136 conclude the "Great Hallel".

The composer and occasion of Psalm 135 are unknown but likely post-exilic Psalm 135:15-20 is strikingly similar to Psalm 115:4-11.

- I. Call to Praise (135:1-2).
- II. Causes for Praise (135:3-18).
 - A. God's Character (135:3);
 - B. God's Choice of Jacob (135:4);
 - C. God's Sovereignty in Creation (135:5-7);
 - D. God's Deliverance of Israel (135:8-12);
 - E. God's Unique Nature (135:13-18);
- III. Concluding Praise (135:19-21).

Verses 1-2: "Servants ... stand ... in the courts":

Addressed to the priests and Levites (compare 134:1).

Psalm 135:1 "Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise [him], O ye servants of the LORD."

Or hallelujah.

Which may be considered as the title of the psalm.

As in the Targum, Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions.

"Praise ye the name of the LORD":

That is, the LORD himself, and the perfections of his nature.

His greatness, goodness, grace, and mercy and his holiness, justice, power, truth, and most of all, His faithfulness.

And also his word, by which he makes known himself, and is a distinguishing blessing to his people, and to be praised for it (see Psalm 48:1).

"Praise him, O ye servants of the LORD":

Priests and Levites, and ministers of the word, and all the people of God.

Who once were the servants of sin, Satan, and the world, but now by the grace of God become his servants (see Rom. 6:17).

Some observe that the word praise is here used three times.

Which is thought not to be without a mystery; and may have regard to the three divine Persons in the Godhead, who are each to be praised.

The Father for electing grace, the Son for redeeming grace, and the Spirit for regenerating and sanctifying grace.

The first praise is telling us what to do, praise.

The second praise is telling us who to praise, the LORD.

The third praise is saying who is to do the praising, servants of the LORD.

The fact that praise is mentioned three times means, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The universal word for praise is Hallelujah.

Psalm 135:2 "Ye that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God,"

That have a place and standing there, and go not out, being sons as well as servants (see notes on Psalm 134:1 and on Psalm 84:4).

"In the courts of the house of our God":

Alluding to the courts in the temple, the court of the priests, where they stood and ministered, slaying and offering their sacrifices.

And the great court, where all the Israelites stood and worshipped (2 Chron. 4:9).

So this may describe the worshippers of God in common, who should praise him: and happy are they that have a place here (see Psalm 84:1).

You that are established (stand), in the LORD.

It seems not to matter whether you are the minister, or those in the outer court, the congregation.

Psalm 135:3 "Praise the LORD; for the LORD [is] good: sing praises unto his name; for [it is] pleasant."

Essentially and communicatively; he is good, and he does good, in a providential way, and that's to all men.

And in a way of special grace to his own people; for whom he has laid up and to whom he has promised good things.

And on whom he bestows them; as pardon, righteousness, and eternal life.

Both grace and glory; and therefore they should praise him.

"For the LORD is good":

A consistent theme in the psalms (compare Psalms 16:2; 25:8; 34:8; 73:1; 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1; 145:9).

"Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant":

Either the work of singing praise is pleasant, being the employment of angels and glorified saints; the subject matter of it being delightful.

The blessings of grace flowing from the everlasting love of God it leads unto, which is excellent and better than life.

And it must be pleasant work to a saint, because it is pleasing to God.

And especially when the presence of God is enjoyed in it, and melody is made in the heart as well as with the mouth.

Or the sense is, "his name is pleasant"; so Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret it.

For though it is holy and reverend in itself, and fearful and terrible to sinners; yet as it is proclaimed in Christ.

It is exceedingly delightful, and in whom all the perfections of God are glorified.

Particularly the name of God, as a covenant God and Father in Christ, blessing, with all spiritual blessings in him, is exceedingly pleasant.

As are all the names of Christ, and therefore to be praised.

When you run out of words to praise Him with, just burst out into song and praise Him with that.

Let me be a sweet, sweet, sound in His ear.

Psalm 135:4 For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, [and] Israel for his peculiar treasure.

“The LORD hath chosen”:

Refers to God’s unique selection of the offering of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to enjoy God’s covenant blessing (compare Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2; Psalm 105:6; Isa. 41:8-9; 43:20; 44:1; 49:7).

“His peculiar treasure” (compare Deut. 26:18-19; see note on Psalm 148:14).

Jacob in the verse above, is speaking of him and his 12 sons, and their physical descendants.

Why God chose Jacob, no one knows.

It is wonderful to be the chosen of God.

To be chosen of God carries great obligation with it as well.

The physical house would have so much to praise God for.

He separated them out of all the peoples of the world to show himself through.

His law was given to them.

He made special covenant with them and protected them.

Jacob's family, God's chosen, will later be called the harlot wife in Hosea.

Israel being separated in the verse above, makes me think that this is speaking of the spiritual house of Israel (Christians).

These are not spiritual Israel who were descended from Jacob, but they who do the will of God.

Psalm 135:5 "For I know that the LORD [is] great, and [that] our Lord [is] above all gods."

“The LORD is great”:

A common superlative to distinguish the true God of Israel from the false gods of the other nations (compare Deut. 7:21; Psalms 48:1; 77:13; 86:10; 95:3; 104:1; 145:3; 147:5).

This was proved over and over.

Elijah proved to the people and the prophets of Baal on mount Carmel that our God is God.

God showed Himself over and over, in the those 10 plagues of Egypt, when He defamed the gods of Egypt.

The very reason Lucifer was thrown out of heaven, was because he thought he was just as good as God.

Psalm 135:6 "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, [that] did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."

God is an absolute sovereign.

He has formed a plan, and has carried it out.

He has made the world as he chose, and he has ordered all its arrangements according to his very own pleasure.

As a universal sovereign, he has a right to universal adoration (see the notes at Psalm 115:3).

"In heaven, and in earth":

These are put for the universe.

These are the universe.

In these places, in all worlds, on the land and in the ocean, even in the profound depths of the sea, there is nothing which has not been placed there by his will.

And which he has not arranged according to his eternal plan.

"In the seas, and all deep places":

In the visible seas, and in the invisible depths, both of the earth and of the waters.

Here then, the psalmist evinces the pre-eminence of Jehovah above the gods of the nations.

By this consideration, that he at the beginning "created and formed those powers of nature whose operations in the heavens, the earth, and the waters.

The only thing necessary for Him to do was speak, and the elements of all nature obeyed Him.

Philippians 2:10 "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;"

Colossians 1:16-17 "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:" "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Psalm 135:7 "He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures."

“Vapors to ascend”:

Refers to the water cycle of earthly evaporation and condensation in the clouds.

Every element in the universe is under His control.

He made it all for a purpose.

There is no need going into all of the creation act here.

We dealt fully with it in our Genesis study.

It is enough for me to know that He did it all.

It rains when He tells it to rain, and it stops when He tells it to stop.

He is supreme Ruler of the universe.

Verses 8-12:

In reference to God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Psalm 135:8 "Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast."

“Smote”:

The final plague in Egypt (compare Exodus chapter 11).

Which was the last of the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians.

And is particularly mentioned, because, by means of it, they were made willing to let the children of Israel go out of their land.

And so, this includes the deliverance of the Israelites, God's firstborn, when he slew the firstborn of Egypt.

And who were typical of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

And the deliverance of them, through the blood of the Passover, was an emblem of the deliverance of those by the blood of Christ (see Exodus 12:22).

This was one of the great examples of separation of those who belong to God, and those who are of the world.

The night that death visited Egypt and killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, the Hebrews, who had the blood of the lamb on their door, were all spared.

Psalm 135:9 "[Who] sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants."

"Tokens and wonders":

Compare Deut. 26:8; 29:3; 34:11.

Or, "signs and wonders":

Meaning the other extraordinary plagues sent among the Egyptians, before that of slaying their of their firstborn.

And which have some likeness to the vials of God's wrath, which will be poured out on the city called spiritually Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8).

"Upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants":

His courtiers: some of them are particularly observed to affect him and his court.

As the plagues of the frogs, and slaying the firstborn.

And he and his princes must be more or less affected with them all, as well as does all of the common people.

Who were an emblem either of Satan and his principalities, as Jerom interprets it; or rather of antichrist and his followers.

To whom the tokens of God's wrath and displeasure will be sent in a wonderful way and manner.

These tokens and wonders were things like the Red sea parting, and the 10 plagues on Egypt.

Psalm 135:10 "Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings;"

Or "many nations".

The seven nations of the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and also the Jebusites.

The kings of which were mighty and many, even thirty one in number (Joshua 12:1).

This the LORD did by Joshua, a type of Christ; who has overcome the world by his sufferings and death, and delivered his people from it.

Who went forth conquering and to conquer, into the Roman Pagan empire, called the whole world, and subdued it by his Spirit and word.

And will show his power in all the kingdoms of this world, either by converting or destroying them; and at last will judge all the nations and kings of the earth.

Aben Ezra interprets this of the kings of Midian, or of those next mentioned, which is best.

The nations where God sent the Hebrews were overcome very easily.

The nations around them were afraid of Israel's God.

The nations knew that God fought for the Hebrews.

Psalm 135:11 "Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan:"

“Sihon”:

Compare Num. 21:21, 32, which recounts Israel’s defeat of Sihon, king of the Amorites.

“Og”:

Compare Num. 21:33-35), which recounts Israel’s defeat of Og, king of Bashan.

“Kingdoms of Canaan”:

Joshua chapters 6 to 12 recounts Joshua’s conquest of the Land.

God gave these kingdoms the opportunity to repent of their evil.

When they did not, God brought the Israelites in to overthrow them, and then gave their land to the Israelites.

Canaan was the land that God had long ago promised Abraham and His descendants as their Promised Land.

Psalm 135:12 "And gave their land [for] a heritage, a heritage unto Israel his people."

"Gave their land ... unto Israel":

As promised to Abraham (compare Gen. 15:18-21).

This land of Canaan was to be the Promised Land.

It became the land of the tribes of Israel.

It was to be theirs forever as their heritage.

Verses 13-18:

The living God of Israel (verses 13-14), stands decidedly superior to the imaginary gods of the nations (verses 15-18).

Psalm 135:13 "Thy name, O LORD, [endureth] for ever; [and] thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations."

The LORD himself endures for ever, in his nature, being, and perfections.

And the fame of him, the fame of those acts of power and goodness before mentioned.

The name of Christ endures for ever.

His person and offices, his Gospel, which is his name.

His children and people, who are called by his name, and in whom his name is perpetuated.

The fame of his wondrous works in nature, providence, and grace; and especially of his great work of redemption and salvation.

"And thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations":

Or "the remembrance of them to, generation and generation"; to every age.

The love of Christ is remembered by his people in every age, the blessings of his grace in redemption, justification, pardon, etc.

And cannot be forgotten as long as his Gospel is preached.

The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper administered, and he has a people in the world, all which will be as long as the sun and moon endure, there will be a memorial of him.

There is no question about the eternity of the LORD.

He is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Everlasting One.

The world may pass away, but He will never pass away.

He is life.

Psalm 135:14 "For the LORD will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants."

Rule and govern, protect and defend them. Plead their cause, and avenge them of their enemies.

Judge between them, distinguish them by his care and providence and make them visible, so that others shall see the difference between them.

Especially at the last day, when he will judge them, and, as the righteous Judge, give them the crown of righteousness.

Or "though the LORD judges his people"; chastises them in a fatherly way, that they may not be condemned with the world (and, or "yet").

"He will repent himself concerning his servants":

Of the evil of affliction he has brought upon them.

He will change the course of his providential dealings with them, according to his unchangeable will; and turn their adversity into prosperity, and their mourning into joy.

Some render it, "he will be entreated for his servants"; he will hear prayer on their account, and save them out of their afflictions.

Or, as others, "he will comfort himself concerning his servants"; take pleasure in them and their prosperity, comfort them, and take delight in so doing.

The Targum of the whole is, "for the Lord will judge the judgment of his people by his word, and to his righteous servants will return in his mercies."

The Lord, Jehovah, is no less than the One we call Jesus here.

Jesus is the Righteous Judge of all the earth.

2 Timothy 4:8 "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

The repenting of concerning His servants, just means that they will be counted pardoned.

This is speaking of those who have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 15-18:

These verses are similar to 115:4-8 and present a satire against pagan idol worship.

Postexilic Israel had seen enough of idolatry to hate it.

Psalm 135:15 "The idols of the heathen [are] silver and gold, the work of men's hands."

This, with what follows, is observed, to show that when God judges his people, and takes vengeance on their enemies, the idols they serve will not be able to protect them, and deliver them out of his hands.

And also to prove what is before asserted, that our Jehovah is great above all gods (Psalm 135:5).

The matter of which they are made is at best gold and silver, which are the dust and metals of the earth, or what the prophet calls thick clay (Hab. 2:6).

And are the creatures of Jehovah, and at his dispose, who says, the silver and the gold are mine (Haggai 2:8).

And who is infinitely above them in value and worth.

Even the knowledge of him, and the words of his mouth, doctrines, and precepts, are better than gold and silver (Prov. 3:14).

"The work of men's hands":

Which they form out of gold and silver into such shapes and figures, and therefore can never have deity in them.

And a most stupid thing it is to imagine that the Godhead is like to gold and silver, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:29; see notes on Psalm 115:4).

Heathens are those who have not accepted the Lord as their Savior.

Idols means nothings.

They are worshipping things made with hands, that they can see with their physical eyes.

Christianity is not believing in things we can see, but is faith in the One we know in our heart that does exist.

Things made with man's hands are the creation.

We must worship the Creator and not His creations.

Psalm 135:16 "They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not;"

Return no answer to the request and petition of all their devoted followers (see the notes on Psalm 115:5).

"Eyes have they, but they see not":

They had, indeed, mouths, eyes, ears, but they could neither speak, see, hear, nor breathe.

Psalm 135:17 "They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there [any] breath in their mouths."

(See notes on Psalm 115:6).

"Neither is there any breath in their mouths":

They are lifeless statues, they have not so much as what the brute creatures have, breath.

Our Jehovah, as the living God, is rightly opposed to them, who gives life, and breath, and all things, unto man.

And yet what amazing stupidity is it, that any of them should worship such as gods, who have not what they themselves have.

They are exactly what the word idols means.

They are nothings.

They have no powers at all.

Psalm 135:18 "They that make them are like unto them: [so is] every one that trusteth in them."

"Make them ... like unto them":

Both are worthless and will know nothing of eternal life.

This is just saying, that anyone foolish enough to make them, and especially those who are foolish enough to worship them are exactly what these idols are: nothings.

They have no future.

Verses 19-20: The categories:

- (1) Israel;
- (2) Aaron;
- (3) Levi; and
- (4) You who fear the LORD, refer to the nation as a whole (Israel), the priesthood (Aaron and Levi), and the true believers (who fear the LORD).

Psalm 135:19 "Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron:"

This passage also, is evidently an imitation of the passage in (Psalm 115:9-13).

The form (in Psalm 115) however, is rather an exhortation to trust in the Lord, and an assurance that God would bless the classes spoken of, than a call on them to bless the Lord.

Still the same classes of persons are referred to; the house of Israel; the house of Aaron; and those who feared the LORD.

The passage needs no further illustration than what is found in the notes at (Psalm 115:9-13).

It is an earnest call on all classes of the people to bless and praise the Lord.

It is language expressive of overflowing joy.

The utterance of a heart full of exalted conceptions of all of the majesty, the glory, and the mercy of God.

Of a heart which feels to the utmost the fitness of praise, and desires that all classes of people, priests and people, that all created things should unite in the praise of Yahweh.

Who, when their reading the psalm, can fail to catch the feelings of the psalmist, and to say Amen and amen!

The house of Israel has plenty room to bless the LORD, whether they be the descendants of Jacob (physical Israel), or whether they be the spiritual house of Israel (Christians).

The house of Aaron is the house privileged to draw the closest to the LORD in the temple.

All of those who are the called of God, such as ministers, should have even more reason to praise the LORD.

Those who know the most about God should bless Him the most.

To whom much is given, much is required.

Of course, we really cannot bless God except by loving Him and doing His will in our life.

Psalm 135:20 "Bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD."

These were of the same tribe with the house of Aaron, but inferior ministers.

They ministered to the priests, and had the charge of things in the tabernacle and temple.

Many of them were porters in the latter, and others were singers.

And of these Kimchi interprets the words.

Whose work it was to give thanks morning and evening, and so are with great propriety called upon to bless the LORD (Num. 3:6).

And may mystically design inferior officers in the church, who are helps and assistants to ministers in the government and discipline of it, and have the care of its secular affairs.

And who, when they behave well, bring to themselves a good degree, and boldness in the faith.

And even doorkeepers in the house of the LORD have reason to bless his name for a place there.

And all the saints are the sweet singers of Israel and have the new song of electing, redeeming, and calling grace, put into their mouths, and therefore should bless the LORD.

"Ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD":

These are distinct from the Israelites, priests, and Levites, and design the proselytes among them of other nations that truly feared God, as Jarchi notes.

And all such persons, whoever and wherever they are, have reason to bless the LORD for the fear of him they have, which is not from nature, but from grace.

And for the layouts shown them, the blessings bestowed upon them, the good things laid up for them, and the guard that is about them, which the Scriptures abundantly declare, and their experience confirms.

Psalm 135:21 "Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

This, according to Aben Ezra, was the formula of blessing to be used by the houses of Israel, Aaron, and Levi, and all that feared God.

Or a direction to them in what manner they should bless him.

And may both point out the persons that were to bless.

And the place where; those that were inhabitants of Zion, where praise waited for the LORD, and was his due.

And the blessings and benefits he was to be praised for, such as came out of Zion, strength from the LORD there.

The rod of his strength, the word of the Gospel, and the Savior himself.

"Which dwelleth at Jerusalem":

In the temple there.

And which distinguishes him from the idols of the Heathens before mentioned.

And who dwells in the heavenly Jerusalem, in Gospel churches.

And will dwell in the New Jerusalem, where his tabernacle will be with men (Rev. 21:3).

"Praise ye the LORD":

Or "hallelujah".

And so the psalm ends as it began, being from first to last an exhortation to praise.

The tribe of Levi are chosen from all the tribes to minister unto the LORD in His temple.

This tribe was set aside by God for holy service.

Therefore, they should lead the way in blessing the LORD.

Church (Zion), bless the Lord.

Even the temple located in Jerusalem should bless the LORD.

Let everything that has breath, praise the LORD.

Psalm 135 Questions

1. What 3 things is verse 1 telling us about praise?
2. What does the word "stand" in verse 2 indicate?

3. When you run out of words to praise Him with, what should you do?
4. Who is the mention of Jacob in verse 4 speaking of?
5. Jacob's family will later be called who, in Hosea?
6. Who is spiritual Israel?
7. Name two or more times when God showed that He was greater than the false gods.
8. Why was Lucifer thrown out heaven?
9. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that He did in _____ and in _____ and all the _____.
10. All things consist by whom?
11. Where do the winds come from?
12. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt?
13. What was this an example of?
14. Name one thing that the tokens and wonders were like.
15. Who were the nations around Israel afraid of?
16. What land had God promised to Abraham?
17. Give some names of God that show His eternity.
18. Who is the Righteous Judge?
19. The repenting concerning His servants, is speaking of whom?
20. What are the idols of the heathen?
21. What does idol mean?
22. What were those who worshipped idols?
23. What special privilege did the house of Aaron have?
24. Blessed be the LORD out of _____.