

Dr. David Emanuel, Session 3, Exodus Psalm 105

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This is Dr. David Emanuel in his teaching on the Exodus Psalms. This is session number three, Psalm 105, Remember and Obey.

So, we've looked at Psalm 78, the second longest psalm in the Psalter. Now we turn our attention to Psalm 105, which I've entitled, Remember and Obey. Introduction. The Exodus motif is part of a much longer selection of history in this particular psalm.

So, it connects all the way back to the promise given to Abraham in Genesis. So, it's part of a much longer history. It's not, if you remember Psalm 78 focused pretty much everything, most of it, about 80 to 90 percent of it was just on the Exodus motif and various parts of it.

He chopped and changed with the order behind it. Psalm 105 focuses more on the Abrahamic covenant and it doesn't chop and change quite so much. Psalm 105 has a relatively strong connection with written tradition.

I'm not able to show you this as much as I would like to, but there are many places in the psalm. We'll see some examples, but there are many places in the psalm where we can see it clearly links back to written tradition, Israelite tradition. We have excellent examples of biblical allusion where the psalmist would use particular phraseology, and particular words to connect the reader back to certain texts.

We'll see some excellent examples of that here. We'll also see, we won't discuss it, but it's worth mentioning that this psalm is reused in the book of Chronicles. The first 15 verses of the psalm appear I want to say verbatim, but it's not quite verbatim.

There are a few tweaks, but there is no doubt at all that the chronicler has appropriated the material of the psalmist. One could say it's the other way around, but the likelihood really is that it's the chronicler who actually borrows the material from the psalm. That's a discussion that I'm not going to go into right now.

Something else we're going to see in this psalm, which is remarkable. We saw in Psalm 78 that the Israelite rebellion is a key theme against the backdrop of the miracles performed by God. In this psalm, we struggle to see anything negative at all.

The whole Exodus is viewed as a positive experience from the beginning. So, let's look at the structure. We begin with this summons to worship in verses one through six approximately.

We'll look at it in more detail. Then there's the promise to Abraham. The promise to Abraham really kicks off the theme or the plot for the whole psalm.

God makes a promise to Abraham and throughout the rest of the psalm, we see that promise in danger and we see God coming to defend it and protect it until it's brought through to fruition. So, we have the incidents that create these narratives on the protection of the promise. We've got the patriarchs, we have Joseph, and then we have Israel in Egypt, and then finally Israel in the desert.

So, we've got four instances recorded from the Exodus as well as from the earlier historical material that narrates how the promise that God made to Abraham is endangered. God has to come in and intervene supernaturally. I don't say he's a great power.

He has to intervene to preserve the promise until it finally comes through to fruition. Then at the end, there is the fulfillment in 44 and 42. Then at the end of it, as I said before, an important location in Psalms is the very end because that's where the point is being made.

That's where the big lesson occurs that the reader has to seriously pay attention to and that's what we find in verse 45. God makes a promise, keeping a promise, and being faithful to that promise doesn't come without a price for the Israelites or for those who are the recipients of his benefits that he makes. So, let's begin looking at the psalm.

We begin here with, O, give thanks to the Lord. The notion of giving thanks, which kind of creates a context of praise as opposed to wisdom literature, gives a context of praise and thanksgiving. But the notion of giving thanks is a little bit different than we understand it today.

In biblical days, particularly with the Psalmist, when we speak of giving thanks, we're not just talking about saying, thank you, which is what happens today in many contexts. But when you give thanks, you have to do two things basically. One of them is that you have to declare it aloud with your mouth.

The second thing is you have to recite what it is that you're giving thanks for. So we're able to say, thank you, Lord, for, I don't know, saving me throughout this day. You would say, thank you, Lord, and you would detail exactly what it is he has done.

That is your expression of thanks. In certain places you will see that the word thanks, let's just take a quick look. The word todah, hoda'a, todah in Hebrew would look something like this, I guess.

Todah from a root yada, like this, like that. This word actually means or has the sense of to confess and to speak out. So we see in the instance in the book of Judges, after the conquest of Jericho, where God says, don't touch any of the stuff, any of the material, just destroy it all.

Achan, one of the Israelites, he sneaks in and he takes a few articles of clothing and a piece of silver and stuff like this. As a result of that, the Israelites lose their battle against Ai, even though it's a relatively small town. Then Joshua turns to God and says, what's going on? Why is this happening? God says, because somebody stole something.

Then God begins to give him the process of filtering out who did it. The family of Achan is isolated from the rest of the Israelites. Joshua turns to him and it's a very interesting phrase, but he says something like give glory to God.

It says, give him thanks, give him todah. That's how it's often translated. It's giving praise.

But the real sense is to confess, speak with your mouth what it is that you have done. That's the sense which we have in this psalm here. When it says, give thanks, speak with your mouth, confess what it is he has done.

That's the sense and that's what happens in the psalm because the psalmist is about to recite what God has done rather than just saying, thank you. He verbally goes through it as well. We've got, to make known his deeds amongst the people, speak of all his wonders.

Again, we mentioned the niflahot, these phrases, niflahot, gedulot, which are miracle phrases that actually happen. More importantly, we've got here the word, remember his wonders which he has done. When we speak about biblical remembrance, it is 99% of the time, it is not a mental act.

Biblical remembrance is not something that resides in the mind. It doesn't live and die in the mind. Biblical remembrance is a process that may begin in the mind, but it's always intended to have a practical action attached to it.

So, when he's saying, remember what God has done, it's not to sit back over a cup of coffee and have nostalgic memories about something, but it's to remember what he has done so that your behavior might change and that you might be different as a result of what you have actually heard. So, you have to keep that in mind in this concept of biblical remembrance. So, we move to the second section, which is basically God, the promise which is being made, the promise which is being recalled to Abraham way back in the book of Genesis.

We have here a clear biblical allusion going back to Genesis 15. On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, to your descendants, I have given this land. To you, I will give the land of Canaan as a portion of your inheritance.

There's a pretty clear allusion back here. This is the promise that the psalmist actually has in mind that he wants you to think about. So, the connection is pretty relatively clear at this point.

But there is an alteration being made, which is quite subtle. We have to be mindful of it. In this promise, it is made not just for land, but it is also made for progeny.

It's also made for protection. He who curses you will be cursed; he who blesses you will be blessed. But these aspects are not the focal point of the psalm.

All he cares about is the promise of land. Land has a very important relevance for this particular psalm. It has been argued that the Psalm was written after the exile.

It's a post-exilic psalm or during the exile. So, it may have been written at a time when the Israelites did not have their own land and they are remembering this promise of land that was given to them. Or they had just come back to the land and they were recalling that promise of land saying, yes, we actually belong here.

That's a reasonable thing to assume. How factual would I go to Vegas and bet on it? I'm not quite sure, but it is a logical thing to assume from the context of the psalm. Moving to the next section, we have the promises made for the land of Israel.

Now we move on to these short narratives or narrative-type sections which speak about times the promise is in danger or was in danger. We begin with this one here and this is what makes this psalm so masterful and so excellent is that the psalmist is basically using the concept of biblical allusion as we know it. So, he says here, when they were only a few men in number, very few and strangers in it.

Now, if you don't know the Bible, if you don't know biblical history, you would just think, okay, there was a time in which the patriarchs were only a few men in the land. But if you know biblical literature, and I believe that's what the psalmist is depending on as we read the psalm, if you know biblical literature, then you will know this passage in Genesis 34. What happens here is that two of Jacob's sons instigate a slaughter on Shechem, the people of Shechem.

As a result, Jacob feels highly threatened. He thinks that the people in the neighborhood or the surrounding cities will hear about this and they will come and they will threaten him. So, he makes this statement, you have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

My numbers are few and if they gather themselves together and attack me, I shall be destroyed. This expression, a few in number occurs in these two places in this narrative context. So, it is clear that what the author is doing is he's activating the reader's mind.

So, this was a case in which the promise was in danger because if Jacob's fears come to fruition, the Canaanites and the Perizzites come against him and destroy him, then the promise made to Abraham would be null and void. It's failed because the people are dead and Abraham's descendants will not be able to inherit the land. So, we see in just a small phrase here, the author is reaching out into your mind if you know the text and he's pulling the whole context of Genesis into his psalm because it reinforces his point.

He doesn't have to quote the whole incident. Obviously, there was no chapter and verses which he could go to. He does that by using a few words that will connect you to that particular story and you will therefore fill in the rest of the gaps.

The same thing happens again. They wander from nation to nation. They've reprov'd kings for their sakes.

Do not touch my anointed ones and my prophets do no harm. Now I've highlighted it in that particular way because again, we see another emphatic structure. This chiasmus is mentioned here again, which is the A B followed by B A. Let's put tags on there.

So, we've got that crossing action going on right there. So, we have, do not touch is the same equals to do not harm. We've got my anointed ones and you've got my prophets.

Those are the two corresponding elements there. It's emphatic. God intervenes to stop or to protect his anointed ones, his people.

Here, once again, we've got this idea of a biblical allusion being activated and it comes from this word prophet. The only time the word prophet is used in connection with the patriarchs comes in this instance here when Abraham goes into Philistine country and Abimelech takes his wife and God has to intervene through a dream and say, give this man his wife back. He does so.

He intervenes. He rebukes the king, which is exactly what happened. He reprov'd the king of the Philistines, not by saying these words, but he said, this man is a prophet.

Return the man's wife. He's a prophet, he will pray for you and you shall live. So we've got another excellent biblical allusion where the psalmist reaches out, grabs a

larger text, and brings that meaning in, even though he's being relatively economical with the choice of words that he actually uses.

Psalm 17 to 22, we have the Joseph story. Again, if Joseph dies, then his family in Jacob back in the land of Canaan would have died from the famine and the promise would have been null and void. The promise is always hanging in the background.

It's hanging on a thread. Can God fulfill it? Can God keep that which he said he was going to do? And so, we have the Joseph story right here. No mention obviously of the brothers and they're selling him.

No mention of what went down with Potiphar and his wife. Everything is positive at this particular time and everything is very much from a godly perspective. God is in control.

Throughout the whole of this psalm, we see it's almost as though events take place on the earth. It's almost as though in this psalm we can see the strings going up to a master puppeteer who is God and he is controlling every situation that happens. There are no mistakes.

There are no coincidences. There are no accidents. God is in total control of what's going on.

We see that throughout this psalm. It says here that he called for a famine upon the land. When we look at the psalmist's perspective of what's going on, God calls the famine.

If we go to the book of Genesis, it simply says there was a famine on the land. It says nothing about God calling for it, God making it happen. So, we have this divine perspective or we have this view of God controlling everything that happened and orchestrating it perfectly according to his will.

We also see this instance here, until the time that his word, that's God's word, came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him. So here again, it's an interpretive lens we're being given because when you read the story in Joseph, as Joseph goes through all of these things with his brothers, with Potiphar's wife, he doesn't know what's going on. It's not saying that God did this and God did that.

God did the other. It just happens and he has to deal with it. But here in the psalmist, the psalmist portrays it, it's God testing him.

It's like testing metal. You're heating up metal to get rid of the impurities. You're making it pure.

You're making it fit for use. And that's as the psalmist views this particular scenario. I'll say a brief word as well about this right here.

This phrase here, it says, the king sent and released him. There are different ways in which we can even understand that. It says here that the king sent and released him.

I argue, as I've argued before, that there are at least two ways of reading this. In Hebrew, that might look something like shalach. I think you've got the article on it, but you've got shalach melech.

I guess it would look something like that. Shalach melech, the king sent, literally this would be he sent and this would be king. I raise this because one way or the common way of understanding it is that the king sent and released Joseph.

But the Hebrew, because it's in poetry and because it's relatively sparse, we could just as easily read that God sent. So he is not the king, but he in fact is God. So God sent the king and then the king was obedient and released Joseph.

I like that way of reading the psalm because it puts God in ultimate control of everything. That's certainly the MO of the psalmist. So, it fits in that very, very well.

The other thing that lends towards that interpretation is simply that the word shalach appears three other times in the psalm and God is always the subject of the verb, never anybody else. So there's a degree of ambiguity in how this is actually rendered. There are a couple of literal versions.

I think Young's literal translation does actually render it such that God sends the king and the king is obedient. I just feel that that actually works better in the psalm. So we move on to Israel in Egypt.

This is when they go in. This is moving from the gap between Genesis and Exodus. We see more of this change of responsibility.

It says here, he, which is God, caused his people to be very fruitful. When we read the text in Exodus, the sons of Israel, were fruitful. They were just fruitful through no special means.

But now from the psalmist's perspective, God's role is elevated and he makes them fruitful. It wasn't an accident. All of this worked according to the purposes and the designs of God.

We see as well something very clever being opened up here with the word Egypt. That's the opening of something which is called inclusion or inclusio. In this case, it's quite cleverly marked out.

Well, what the psalmist has basically done is he's used the word, if this is the psalm, let's schematize the psalm like that. Then he uses the word Egypt and then he goes into his description. What he does that's particularly clever is he never uses the word Egypt again until the Israelites leave Egypt.

Inside this section of the text, the Israelites dwell in Egypt, but he never uses the word, even though he has an opportunity to do so. So he will use different types of synonyms. We'll see a couple of them or he uses pronouns, them, and things like that.

But he never uses the word Egypt again until the Israelites leave. This is something called *inclusio* or an inclusion. It's a means of segregating or separating certain texts from the rest of the material.

In this case, there is a wonderful opportunity for the psalmist to use Egypt, but he doesn't say, miracles in where? The land of Ham. He does that all of the time throughout this section, which is really quite clever. We have something here, Moses and Aaron are both mentioned.

They're given a mention, but it's almost a perfunctory mention because even though they appear and are named, if you remember in Psalm 78, we didn't see any mention of them. They are named here, but when it comes to the plagues and the things that God does, they don't really do it. We run back to that singular, third masculine singular of God performing everything himself.

But at least they are mentioned here. They kind of get some kind of a cameo role in all of the proceedings. When it comes to the plagues on the whole, we're going to look at these in more detail as well.

The references to the plagues only occur in Psalms 105 and 78. Only they have a full rendition of the plagues. Everywhere else we'll only really just mention the firstborn and a general kind of a, he smote the Egyptians.

But now we have another full rendition of the plague in this particular place. That's just an image of the 10 plagues of Exodus. But as we're going to find out, we don't get 10 plagues here.

Once again, we only get seven. It appears as though we only get seven. So we begin with darkness, sending darkness and making it dark.

We've got this expression here that he did not, they did not rebel against his words, which is really, what didn't rebel? Is this a reference to Moses and Aaron not rebelling? Or is this a reference to the darkness and these plagues are not rebelling

against his word? A bit of dual meaning there perhaps. Darkness is seen as the least severe and with these plagues, we're going to see that is a stronger case for growing intensity as we go through them all. So we begin with darkness, obviously a move from the Exodus account, which is last.

And now we're up here. Then we've got blood, which kills fish. That's the damage, which it does a little bit more harsh than the darkness perhaps.

I would say as well, because we have all of this up, that there's a, I mentioned that the full rendition of the plagues is only in Psalm 105 and Psalm 78. But I will say that there's a scroll in Qumran, I think it's 4Q422, which also has a rendition of the plague, but there are only about nine plagues mentioned there. It would seem that scroll I still think needs some work being done to it.

A couple of articles have been produced on it, but I get a feeling that Psalm, that text needs a little bit more work dedicated to it. So, what's next? Next, we have frogs, which are viewed as a nuisance. They are frogs even in the chamber of the kings.

Unlike the frogs of Psalm 78, these aren't devouring frogs. So, these aren't ones that do any physical damage. They go into the king's chamber, and they affect him, but they don't cause any harm or lasting damage.

Then we've got swarms again. We come back to the issue of arov. What are arov? I said before in the book of, sorry, in Psalm 78, the arov seemed to be wild animals.

At least there was a tradition, certainly very strong in Jewish literature. Arov, how would you do it? Let's just do that for argument's sake. But here it seems to be coupled with gnats.

So, swarms, here it's got swarms of flies and gnats. But if we go back to that meaning of arov as swarms, then it may be better to read, and there came forth swarms, gnats in all their territory. In that sense, the second part of the verse would explain the first part.

So first you would have a general description that there were swarms and the second part is more specific gnats in all of their territory. That's another way of looking at it in order to move away from this idea of swarms necessarily meaning flies, which I prefer not thinking of swarms specifically as flies because that's not what the word actually says. So one or two plagues, I would count this as one.

This is another non-destructive plague that was sent against the Egyptians. Once again as well, these are things which he spoke and they came. These are things that God has done deliberately.

It doesn't say they spoke. It doesn't suggest Moses and Aaron spoke, but it is God who speaks and he implements these plagues directly. Hail fire only affects plants, but here we see two verses per plague.

That's this one here, but we have hail fire, which is recognized also in the Exodus tradition. So that's pretty good. Also the locust, which still affects plants, has another two verses dedicated to it.

They came locusts and young locusts without number, ate up all the vegetation, and ate up the fruit of their ground. So, we've got this, what seems to be some kind of intensity building up. Then of course we have the firstborn.

So, in both Psalm 78 and in this Psalm here, the firstborn is always the ultimate plague. Now the plague of the firstborn is the ultimate plague, but it's always seen as being the most significant. It's significant in this sense that all of the other plagues could possibly be explained by creation somehow running rampant.

So, you've got all of these frogs, you've got all of these swarms. These are phenomena which they may well have experienced in the past. Plague of darkness, well, this could have been an eclipse of some description.

A plague of blood, as some people in sciences today have said, there could have been a particular type of algae that affected the rivers at that time. Locusts, well locusts came anyway, hail, they came anyway. But when we're talking about a plague that only affects the firstborn of the Egyptians, this is very different.

This is, as it's written in Scripture, the hand of God. This must be something that only God can do. So, it's not just destructive.

It's not just powerful in its effects, but it's powerful when you think about the cause of it. This is pointing to a holy God who is being incredibly selective in who he strikes down. So, it's incredibly relevant, which may be why it's always in that last position.

We've got to take a step back and remember, this is all about defending the people. If the slaves, if the Israelites are kept in slavery in Egypt, there can be no Exodus. They cannot enter the land.

The promise of God fails. So, God has to intervene to get his people out to protect them, but more importantly to protect his promise. So now we move out.

They've come out. Then he brought them out with silver and gold. It mentions here, Egypt was glad and here we go.

They've left Egypt now. So now we see the word Egypt appear. That was the end of that inclusion, which I had mentioned earlier.

This is where we see it. Up until this point in the Psalm, there was danger from people, the kings who were threatening the patriarchs. We had Pharaoh threatening Joseph and also the Israelites enslaving them.

But now as they go out into the desert, the threat is not from people, but the threat is from creation. It's from the sun and it's from hunger and things like that out in the desert. We see an interesting description of the cloud.

He spread a cloud for a covering. This is interesting because in Exodus, the cloud doesn't function as a covering. The cloud is a guide.

It's a pillar of a cloud that leads the Israelites during the day that they follow it. That's also a pillar of fire at night. So, it's a guide, but here it seems to reflect a different tradition of the cloud as a covering.

Here in Isaiah 4.5, there's something kind of similar, and the Lord will create over the whole site of the Mount of Zion and over us a cloud by day and a smoke and a shining of a flaming fire by night. So here in the context of Isaiah 4.5, this cloud here is protective against the heat of the sun during the day. It seems to reflect this idea here as well.

Then there are other Jewish traditions. I think in Ben Sira, you will see a similar idea of this reflected too, in which the cloud is not just a guide, but it also protects the people. That is the notion of protection, I would argue, is stronger in the context of Psalm 105 because God is protecting his people in the same way that he's protecting his promise from anything that might endanger it.

So we see this rendition of the desert motif, no hints of complaints for water, complaints for food, no rebellions against Moses. If we only have this account of the Exodus, it would be the most joyous of occasions. That's what the Psalmist wants you to believe, at least for this particular time.

So, he skips anything negative. This is an aspect of biblical interpretation. He's only presenting the positive side.

It was obviously written by an eternal optimist. Now we come to this section here where we return to the promise. There's an allusion back to an earlier part of the Psalm right here.

You remember this holy word with Abraham, the covenant which he made with Abraham, his oath to Isaac. So now we're going full circle. He did all of this because

he remembered his holy word, that promise which he made all the way back in verse nine.

Yes, he's remembered that promise and he's been faithful to it. He brought his people out with joy and he gave them the lands of the nations. So that which God promised to do, he was able to keep.

He did bring them to that land and that's wonderful, but it doesn't end there. Yes, he did that. Yes, he preserved his promise.

Yes, he was good to his people, but now we have the obligation of the people so that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Yes, he did it, but all of this is for them to realize that they need to serve him. They need to keep his law as a result of his faithfulness to them.

It's kind of like what didn't happen with Psalm 78. Now once again, we see this chiasmic pattern, keep his statutes, his laws, observe, and that's at the end. You'll notice as well that this chiasmus is often used at the end of a psalm or at the end of a very critical section because it drives home a very specific message to the readers.

Some interpretive notes on the plagues. This idea of gradual intensity from the darkness, the first plague to the firstborn has been mentioned by certain scholars. There's a harmless inconvenience with the darkness.

You've got the blood that kills fish, doesn't affect people. The frogs become an inconvenience to the king. So now we're encroaching onto the royalty.

You've got the swarms and lice, which is a dual attack possibly, or just lice. The fact that they've got the mention of both of them, which are recorded as two different plagues in the book of Exodus, may suggest a degree of intensity. We then have a move to two verses per plague with the hail and also with the locust.

Then finally you've got the death to humans. So many have seen this as a gradual level of intensity in which God gets slightly more angry, slightly more angry, slightly more angry. Then he kills the firstborn and then it's all over.

A few more things right here, interpretive notes. God's word is extremely important in this psalm as a binding motif or an idea. If you look at verse five, remember the wondrous works he's done, the miracles and the judgments he utters, the judgments that God speaks.

We find direct speech. God says, touch not my anointed ones. If you look at that in light of verse five, one of the judgments he utters is to the king saying, don't touch my anointed people.

God called a famine on the land. It's something he uttered again, a judgment of his mouth that he speaks. The word of God, a word, an utterance of God tests Joseph in verse 19.

Verse 31, God spoke and there came forth flies. Again, he speaks and then it happens. He spoke and locusts came as well.

So, we see this emphasis on the spoken word of God. We never saw this in Psalm 136. We never saw this in Psalm 78 either.

It's something very peculiar to this psalm. Negativity is absent, no negative events. Abraham's lie, he got himself into trouble twice telling kings that Sarah was his sister.

No mention of that. Joseph's brother selling him, no mention of that. Only the positive things, food complaints in the desert, the rebellion at Kadesh, the great rebellion when they didn't want to enter the promised land the first time around.

All of these things happen in the Exodus account, but because of the psalmist's goals, he doesn't mention anything negative. So, to summarize in this particular psalm, the focus is God fulfilling his promise and defending the people and the promise. Those are two things that are linked together.

The people are destroyed, the promise fails. The history covered is not just the Exodus, but we go from Abraham all the way to the entry into the promised land. Nothing is mentioned as we saw in Psalm 78 of the entrance into the land and the idolatry that goes on there.

We stop at the giving of land. It's that idea of land I mentioned before, quite important because it could have represented a time when the Israelites were either divorced from their land or had been newly reunited with it. In omission of the giving of the Torah, I think is very important.

There's nothing mentioned about Sinai because obviously at the end of the psalm, obedience to the law is what's being required, but its giving was never mentioned. That could just be because it's too closely aligned with the rebellion tradition of the golden calf. But we nevertheless have it omitted.

Perhaps the most important aspects of this particular psalm is the elevation of God as he tests Joseph. He multiplies Israel. He calls it a famine.

He enacts the plagues directly. God's role is drastically changed from Exodus to the psalm. He is, as I said before, he is portrayed as this master puppeteer controlling every event exactly as he wants so his purposes are fulfilled.

So that brings us to the end of Psalm 105, very different to Psalm 106, another long psalm, but the emphasis is far more positive as the psalmist filters out those individual negative things from this work.

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