

Dr. David Emanuel, Session 5, Exodus Psalm 135

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This is Dr. David Emanuel in his teaching on the Exodus Psalms. This is session number five, Psalm 135, The Lord's Supremacy.

Okay. We come now to the last psalm we'll be looking at. We began this journey looking at Psalm 136. We've come full circle now and we reached the last one, Psalm 135, which I've termed or I've called, The Lord's Supremacy.

So, we have here, the notes that should give you a clue, basically a hymn of praise, what Gunkel defines as a hymn of praise. So, if you think in terms now of all of the genres, different genres we've seen, we've seen Psalm 136, which is a type of hymn of praise. But then we've seen Psalm 78, which is a bit like a lament or more like a wisdom psalm.

We've seen another hymn of praise in Psalm 105 that's very unique and different. We've seen a lament, a definite lament with Psalm 106. So, none of the Exodus Psalms, we can't say all the Exodus Psalms are one particular genre, but they cross genres and that's fine.

That's okay. The Exodus material is not that much and it is abbreviated in this particular psalm. But the way in which the psalmist uses it is special.

It's individual and it's a bit different from what we've seen previously. The primary use of the Exodus in this particular psalm is a means of demonstrating the omnipotence of God. You will see in particular regard to the impotency of other idols.

So, there's a direct comparison. We'll see how that works in just a moment, but there's a direct comparison between the power of God and what he can do and the impotency of the other idols. Something else that makes this psalm unique is that it is highly dependent on biblical literature.

I don't think there is a single verse within this text that is not connected to another place in biblical literature. So that's something that you're going to see and we haven't seen that before. For that reason alone, there is a strong indication that this psalm is relatively late.

As a hymn of praise as well, like Psalm 105, you'll find too that it's a relatively positive theme, and anything negative that Israel does has by and large been omitted. Looking at the structure, we begin with an introduction, in which you normally find a hymn of praise in which the song invites people to praise God and to come together

as a community. We then have a description of God's omnipotence in creation and in Exodus.

We've seen before that the two themes were linked. When we find Exodus, we will often find creation. We found that in some of the descriptions, the description of God rebuking the sea is an image that we find in the creation narrative.

In Psalm 105, that's a case where there's no evidence of creation there in that particular psalm. But if we take a step back to Psalm 104, you will find that 104 is in fact a creation psalm. So, it leads right up to the Exodus material.

Being as I'm on that topic, it's worthwhile just taking a brief look at the three psalms that we've just previously dealt with. Being as I'm here now, Psalm 104, 105 and 106. If you look at them together, you will see that 100 covers creation.

Then we go, as we've seen from Abraham through to the entry of the promised land. Here we go from the crossing of the three seas all the way through to the exile. So when you look at these psalms together, you kind of have a summary of history from creation all the way through to the exile.

So that was just by the by. God's omnipotence in creation and in Exodus. Then we have a small praise intermission, two verses that don't really talk about any sort of historical event, but they recall the introductory praise.

Then you have a description of the impotency of the nation's idols, the silver and gold, and the shapes which they mold, and how useless these things basically are. Then finally, there's an exhortation to praise in verses 19 through 21. The structure, we're dividing up the psalm in this particular way.

You'll see that there is a degree of correspondence between the initial introduction and the exhortation to praise. Both of them have this idea of praise. Both of them use this phrase, Hallelujah.

More importantly is the comparison therefore between God's omnipotence, which is matched directly with the impotency of the nation's idols. So that comparison is forced and in the center, we have our praise intermission. We're going to talk about that in just a moment.

So, we've got the introduction to praise. We've got praise the Lord. Now this is another one of those pet peeves.

It's joined towards this as well. We've got the Hebrew phrase, Hallelujah, which literally means praise the Lord. But you'll see variants in the translations.

Some actually write the word Hallelujah as one word. Others try to split it as I have done here to show that what we have here in this phrase, which I think is a very important, a powerful phrase, is we've got two words in Hebrew that are joined together, which actually may look something like Hallelujah. So, we've got Hallel, this word here, which is an imperative, which is like a command telling you to praise or to boast about Yah, to boast about the Lord.

So, it's not just a word that you say. It is, in fact, a word which should be encouraging people to praise the Lord. It translates differently in different places.

Praise the Lord, sing praise to him. The Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for his own possession. There's a very important word here, *segula*.

They are an *am segula*, a people which is a special possession. If you go to the book of Ecclesiastes, it uses this word that talks about a special treasure that you would have and you would keep aside, which is your personal property. That is what the idea of *segula* basically is.

So, it's not any possession, but it is a very special possession. It links to this passage in Exodus. This is just to show you as well that connections to the Exodus motif are not necessarily on these supernatural acts.

But here we've got a connection, a covenant connection, where God says, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession. Then you will be *segula shali*, my *segula*, which is my special possession from among the nations. So just having the translation as own possession, I perhaps think is a little bit of a disservice to the strength and the weight of that particular word.

But that's as I feel. Once again, you've got Elohim. When you've got this, we began with this God or gods.

That the Lord, Adonai is great and that our Lord, Adonai is above all gods, above all Elohim. It's that word again, which doesn't refer to the God of Israel, but it refers to other gods or idols of the nations. This, as we read the introduction to the psalm, we should have our senses up.

Previously when we read an introduction to some of the psalms, we read the introduction to Psalm 105. We read the introduction as well to Psalm 78. In both of those psalms, to introduce the psalm, we had the word *niflahot*.

I mentioned that or *gedolot*, which was this miracle language. Even in the introduction, what that tells you is that it gives you a hint of what's to come in the psalm. We're going to be discussing the *gedolot*, what the *niflahot* of Adonai actually are in the psalm.

So, here's a hint of it. In this case here, we've got God is a great God and that our Lord is above all gods. Here as well, we've got a similar indication and a similar key.

The psalmist is saying, Hey, this is what I'm going to be talking about. This is the main topic of what I'm saying. Our God is greater than all other gods.

If you don't know how, then keep reading and you're going to find out. I'm going to explain that to you. So, you've got the basic theme being established in the introduction to the psalm.

Not just here, it happens quite often. There'll be clues, there'll be hints, there'll be allusions to what is coming on. So now we come to this section of God's omnipotence, the greatness of God.

We first see examples of omnipotence in creation. Now when we think about creation, oftentimes in our minds, in the modern person's mind, creation is an event that happens in six days, six periods of time. It's not my job to enter into the theology of the whole situation, but for biblical sakes, it says it happens in six days.

But people see creation as happening in that period. God came down, he created the world, made mankind, and then he took a step back and he moved back. I mentioned this before.

Some would then have it that he then finds mother nature to go and run things for him whilst he rests in this eternal rest. This idea of creation, it's not the biblical notion of creation. The biblical notion of creation is that God creates the world and he continues making things turn.

He continues sending rain. He continues sending the sun. He continues growing crops, trees, and plants.

He continues to be active and involved in the world. He hasn't taken a step back at all. So, when we look at God causing the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth, this is an act of creation.

He keeps the world moving. He continually remains involved in the running and the management of this world and of this planet. So, we've got the omnipotence in creation followed by the omnipotence in Exodus with kind of like a reversed order, a bit of a reversed order here.

The first thing it mentions is the smiting of the firstborn in Egypt, both man and beast. Then it says he sent signs and wonders into your midst. Well, he did the signs and wonders, if you like, first.

He did the other plagues and then he did the firstborn, but the firstborn is mentioned first. We also have this mention of Pharaoh and his servants, which recalls what we did first in Psalm 136. Now the relationship between these two Psalms is quite special and I'll be discussing that a little bit later on.

So, it says again, a summary statement, he smote many nations and slew mighty kings. For example, we've got this focus again on the Transjordan region where he speaks of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. So, by now there should be a sense of *deja vu* because we kind of heard this in Psalm 136.

As a result of all of that, because he owns creation and runs creation, he is able and he is qualified to distribute the land as a heritage to his people, Israel. That's exactly what he does. Once again, you see more clearly here though, the terraced pattern of he gave their land as a heritage.

So, you've got a heritage repeated here, a heritage to Israel, his people. Again, those words will ring a bell with the previous Psalm, no doubt. In many ways, as we look at this section of the Psalm, we need to understand it as a divine resume.

What the Psalmist is doing is he is portraying a picture of the God of Israel. Who is this God? What does he do? Well, here's his resume. He runs the world.

He smites kings for the sake of his people and he distributes land for the sake of his people. That's what our God does. This is who he is in the same way we would have a resume that describes what we have done in our lives and who we are.

So we have the divine resume laid out at this particular point. Then we go on to a praise intermission that speaks of, your name, O Lord, is everlasting. Your remembrance, O Lord, through all generations, for the Lord will judge his people and will have compassion on his servants.

This is very much, as I mentioned before, a literary hinge. It comes in the middle of the Psalm. We've had an introduction.

We've had God's resume. We're hinging now before we go and look at the resume of the gods, the idols of the nations. In this case, we've got the word judge, for the Lord will judge his people.

The expression judge has various connotations. It's the idea of apportioning that which is good for the good people and that which is punishment for the bad people. So, when the Lord will judge his people, he can only judge, it's only a positive action if the righteous.

You would assume that the Psalmist is assuming his people are righteous because if the Lord will judge his people, then it's not so much judging them as it is vindicating them. You are righteous and therefore I'm going to give you all of these positive things. Therefore, it's something to be welcomed.

But if you want to judge your enemies, you know they're doing wrong and therefore punishment is going to be given to them. The idea of name, your name, it goes back, harkens back to verse one. It says that your name, O Lord, is everlasting.

The idea of the Hebrew name in this context is the idea of one's reputation. It's his reputation, the things that you do rather than just thinking in terms of the divine name. It's everything that's attributed to it, the power that's behind it, the authority, the omnipotence that's behind it as well.

So now we turn to the resume of the idols, the idols of the nations. Here through the structure, as I'd shown you before, the comparison is directly with the Lord and what the Lord can do. The idols of the nations basically have features, but no function.

They have features, but no function. This is in direct comparison because if you know the God of Israel, he has no features, but is all function. He does stuff, but nobody knows what he looks like.

Nobody has an image of him, which is the total opposite of what's going on with these other idols. They are made with silver and gold, an interesting inclusion here. We saw one with Egypt in Psalm 105, but here we have one with mouths.

Mouths they have, but they do not speak. They have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear, nor is there any breath at all in their mouths.

So, what you have here is between the two words, mouth, is you have the description of the gods of the nations regarding their facial features. So that's just a way of encapsulating a group or a particular series of characteristics through what's called an inclusion. From this, you would assume that the purpose of this psalm really is to discourage idolatry.

It's to say, if you recite this psalm, you are saying that our God is great, but so why worship idols? They don't do anything. So, it is quite negative and it is quite disparaging concerning the gods of the other nations. So, it's there to dissuade people from turning to other idols.

The last section we have here is a group exhortation in which various groups within the temple, it's assumed that there would have been different groups, and different choirs there. It would have been, assuming that it was recited in the temple, they

would have been encouraged to bless God. So, you have a house of Aaron, the house of Levi, those who revere the Lord, God-fearers basically.

Those who fear the Lord is probably a better description. Then you've got this general blessing. So, we've got some kind of a temple setting with different groups in the temple.

We've got praise the Lord, which is mentioned here. This is another inclusion where the psalm begins basically and ends with the words, Hallelujah. So that encapsulates everything that's in the psalm.

This is a song of praise and at the beginning and the end are cast the same way. What is very peculiar about this psalm as mentioned before is that it is highly dependent upon other biblical texts, not in just the sense that it alludes to other material. It's much more severe than that.

In certain senses, if you allow me to be so crass as to name it like this, this is kind of a Frankenstein psalm in that it's a psalm that has been put together almost from the spare parts of many other psalms. In spite of this, the psalmist has still been able to create it and shape it very carefully into his own work. So, let's take a look at some of the more brash examples of literary borrowing within this psalm.

If we look here, these are two texts. This is Psalm 135.7 and this is Jeremiah 10.13. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth, who makes the lightnings for the rain, and who brings forth the wind from his treasuries. He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth, makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

These are two passages. Now, once again, I'm going back to my pet peeve. The Hebrew wording here, apart from a change in tense, is exactly the same.

Yet the Nazbi has seen to translate vapors here and clouds here, even though it's exactly the same. I know it's not important, but it still kind of bothers me that if the psalmist has been so careful as to copy words from one place into the other, why can't the translators do the same thing? There shouldn't really be a change here, but that's for another day. So we see this kid, this is exact copying apart from one where there's a participle, which is changed for a va'iktol, a vav plus imperfect form.

Apart from that, this is exactly the same wording that's used in this particular place. Let's look at this example here. Verse 14, Deuteronomy 32, 36, For the Lord will judge his people and will have compassion on his servants.

Once again, we have judge, mishpat, it's the same word, but we have vindicate here, but judge here in the two places for whatever reasons. Maybe the people who

translated Deuteronomy were in Toronto and the people who did the psalm were in Texas and they just never spoke. But there's a deliberate copying and borrowing that the psalmist has done, which is messed up a little bit in the translational issue.

But the wording here is exactly the same. So it's just taken from one place and put into another. We have another example here from Psalm 136.

So, we've come full circle now. We find this description of God who smote many nations and slew mighty kings. We've got smote great kings.

Now, if you kind of ignore the, for his loving-kindness is forevermore, you will see some similarities. Sihon king of the Amorites, Sihon king of the Amorites, again, ignore this. Og king of Bashan, Og king of Bashan, and he gave their land as a heritage.

He gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel, a heritage to Israel. So, we see the exact wording, which has been taken from another psalm. In this case, it happens to be the psalm that actually follows it.

If this were not enough, we can then go further to looking at Psalm verse 15 and Psalm 115.4. And in this case, we've got the idols of the nations are but silver and gold. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak.

They have mouths, but they do not speak. Again, let's not talk about that. They have eyes, but they do not see.

They have eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they do not hear. They have ears, but they cannot hear.

Those who make them will be like them. Those who make them will become like them. Yes, everyone who trusts in them, everyone who trusts in them.

Psalm 135, is the same wording that has been borrowed from another psalm. And so, we see this is why I would describe it as a Frankenstein psalm because the psalmist is clearly borrowing wording from all of these individual places. This is not the end of the matter because there's much more to it.

We just don't have time to go into every detail. These are the clearest examples, but it's clear that he is borrowing material. Even more strangely, some of the Exodus material, he's not go back to Exodus to use it.

He's using another psalm. So, he's just like we saw in the first example where the psalmist borrowed from Exodus 15 from a poetic example and the prose example. Here he's going to another poetic tradition in order to help create his work.

But in spite of that, he does nevertheless create something new, something very new from these old bits and pieces. So even though we can see these clear literary allusions, we should not be lulled into a sense of thinking that somehow it's a cheap work that has no creativity in it because there is still a great deal of creativity in the way in which he has ordered his parts. So, to summarize, we're going to summarize this psalm and then afterwards I'm going to try to wrap up everything else that we've learned about the Exodus psalms in closing.

The first thing is we have the Exodus as a hymn of praise. It's a hymn of praise again, like Psalm 105, but it is very different from Psalm 105. The historical period covered is really quite different.

There's much more addition of other material such as the creation material we have here, as well as this direct comparison with other idols. So yes, they are similar, but we mustn't forget they are very, very different and very unique if I can even say also. Also in this psalm we have no intermediaries.

We don't have a mention of Moses. We're back to where we started off. No clear mention of Aaron, of any of these figures, or any of these Israelite leaders at all.

These things are all skipped over. Also like Psalm 136, we can see this theme of God versus kings. That's borrowed from the following psalm.

Another reason why they may have been juxtaposed, but it's borrowed from the following psalm. We have a mention of the kings of Pharaoh plus the kings of the Amorites of Og and Sihon that God does battle with these people and fights for his people in that sense. All of this is there to show that God, it's not to demonstrate his eternal mercy and his eternal love, which is what was used before.

But here it's to demonstrate his potency versus the potency of the idols of the nations. Then the last thing we see in this psalm as well is that it blends creation with Exodus. It links the two things directly together.

I've mentioned before those two themes are inexplicably linked throughout Exodus psalms and throughout the Bible. So that ends Psalm 135. So, what I want to do now is just quickly go through some final summary points of all the psalms of the Exodus.

I want to emphasize some of the important things that we need to really grasp when looking at its appearance within the Exodus Psalms, within the Psalter. So, some

summary points. First of all, it's important to remember as I began that the Exodus is the most influential biblical tradition in the Bible.

The most influential tradition. It permeates absolutely everything. It goes from Genesis.

I've mentioned before, we saw an example of it in the book of Genesis with the torch between the pieces. I could be more explicit and we could talk about Abraham going into Egypt. If you think about that story when he first goes in, in Genesis 12, when Abraham first goes into Egypt, he goes down into Egypt to escape a famine.

Whilst he's in Egypt, he is then oppressed by a Pharaoh. Through that oppression, he is then delivered by God. God intervenes.

Pharaoh's house is plagued and he is then set free. When he leaves Egypt, he leaves Egypt with more silver and gold. So that's what Abraham does.

This is a direct reflection of Israel who leaves Canaan and goes into Egypt because of a famine. Whilst in Egypt, they are oppressed by Pharaoh. God intervenes, and plagues Pharaoh, and as a result, they leave Egypt with silver and gold, just like Abraham.

So, there's a clear mirror right there between what goes on in Genesis and also in the Exodus. So, in that sense, Abraham's actions foreshadow the Exodus later on. That goes all the way through to the book of Revelation as well, where we find the plagues being described that are sent upon the earth, the locusts, the frogs, all of these things are coming from the Exodus motif.

It is across the whole of the Bible and so to find it in the Psalter should not at all come as any surprise. The next thing we need to be aware of is that there is clearly a conversion from prose to poetry. When we look at biblical Hebrew poetry, it is slightly more flamboyant.

It's slightly more exaggerated. So there has to be a necessary change from recalling or transferring a prose story into a poetic story. We see that change going on.

We've seen it in some of the language of some of the Psalms. We looked at it in Psalm 78 where things were exaggerated slightly. Other traditions were recalled.

So, we had the doors of heaven being opened. We have angels' food being eaten by people. So, this is kind of like a transformation of the prose into a poetic version of the same rendition.

It's very important to realize as well that the Exodus occurs in different genres. It's not limited to one thing. This is something as well, many Christians limit the idea of the Exodus to the simple practice of salvation.

It describes how we were slaves to sin and how we've been freed from our sin into something else. That's just one use of the Exodus, but it appears in many different ways and it's used in many different ways in the Psalter and indeed for the rest of the Bible. So, the fact that it appears in different genres is a reflection of the way in which it's used differently.

Perhaps most important is the elevation of God's role in the Exodus. There is a repetitive theme throughout the Psalms we've looked at whereby the deeds of men are pushed down and minimized and the acts of God are elevated. He becomes so much more in direct control.

He sends the plagues. He sets people free. He splits the sea.

It's not about Moses and his staff anymore. It's not about Moses and Aaron going to Pharaoh saying, let my people go otherwise. It's about God taking action and directly coming into confrontation with creation in the water and in the desert and with people as well.

Then there is perhaps the most important point touched upon before and that it's tailored for specific purposes. By this, I want to really just finish up all of this by emphasizing that when we are looking at the Psalmists who deal with the Exodus motif, we are dealing with people who tailor it for specific purposes. What this basically means is that when we talk about Psalmists, we're not talking so much about songwriters, but we are talking about biblical exegetes.

We are talking about people who are performing biblical exegesis. They're reading a narrative and they are taking that narrative and they are making it work for specific purposes to teach a particular point. This work of the Psalmist, I think, has been generally underplayed.

We simply think of them as songwriters. We think of them as people sitting on a hill with a harp in their hands, writing beautiful music and listening to the birds and taking it all in. But really we should be thinking of the Psalmist as people who are sitting in a library with books before them who are opening up stories of Abraham, stories of the Exodus.

They are taking these things together and they are reshaping them into a message that is unique to their audience. So that's where I end. I hope you've enjoyed this brief presentation.

If there's anything else, there's nothing else that you take from all of this, it is very important to remember that the Psalmist is a biblical exegete.

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