

Exodus Psalms - Psalm 135: The Lord's Supremacy

Dr. David Emanuel | Session 5

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Keywords

Exodus Psalms, Psalm 135, Idolatry, Divine Omnipotence, Frankenstein Psalm, Biblical Exegesis, Segula, Hymn of Praise

Abstract

Dr. David Emanuel analyzes Psalm 135 as a hymn of praise that demonstrates Yahweh's supreme omnipotence in creation and the Exodus in direct contrast to the helplessness of pagan idols. The lecture highlights the psalm's heavy reliance on intertextual borrowing from passages such as Jeremiah 10, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 115, and Psalm 136, characterizing it as a carefully crafted "Frankenstein psalm." Ultimately, Emanuel demonstrates that the psalmist functions not merely as a songwriter, but as a sophisticated biblical exegete tailoring ancient texts to discourage idolatry and affirm Israel's special covenantal status. Through structural analysis of literary hinges and inclusions, the session shows how biblical poetry elevates direct divine action while seamlessly blending creation and redemption motifs.

Outline

I. Introduction to Psalm 135 and Genre Overview

- A. Context as Session 5 in the Exodus Psalms series by Dr. David Emanuel
- B. Classification as a Gunkel-defined hymn of praise
- C. Cross-genre comparisons across the Exodus Psalms (Psalms 78, 105, 106, 136)
- D. Unique features: brief Exodus recall, focus on divine omnipotence vs. idol impotency, and extensive literary borrowing

II. Literary Dependence and Historical Setting

- A. High degree of intertextual connection to existing biblical literature
- B. Indication of a relatively late date of composition
- C. Positive focus omitting Israel's historical transgressions

III. Structural Breakdown of Psalm 135

- A. Introduction (vv. 1–4): Call to praise and Hallelujah refrain
 - 1. Exhortation to praise the Lord ("Hallel-u-yah")
 - 2. Covenantal status of Israel as God's special treasure ("segula")
 - 3. Theme established: Adonai is greater than all other gods ("Elohim")
- B. God's Omnipotence in Creation and Redemption (vv. 5–12)
 - 1. Ongoing divine agency in creation (rain, lightning, wind)

2. Historical acts in the Exodus (smiting the firstborn, signs, and wonders)
3. Defeat of Transjordanian kings (Sihon of the Amorites and Og of Bashan)
4. Distribution of Canaan as a heritage to Israel (Divine Resume)

C. Literary Hinge / Praise Intermission (vv. 13–14)

1. Everlasting name and memorial across generations
2. Vindication and judgment ("mishpat") of God's people

D. Impotency of the Nation's Idols (vv. 15–18)

1. Features without function (mouths that cannot speak, eyes that cannot see, ears that cannot hear)
2. Contrast with Yahweh: invisible feature-less God with supreme function
3. Warning against idolatry: worshippers become like their inanimate idols

E. Concluding Call to Praise (vv. 19–21)

1. Group exhortation to different temple groups (House of Israel, Aaron, Levi, God-fearers)
2. Structural inclusion starting and ending with "Hallelujah"

IV. Specific Examples of Intertextual Borrowing ("Frankenstein Psalm")

- A. Jeremiah 10:13 vs. Psalm 135:7 (exact Hebrew wording for atmospheric phenomena)
- B. Deuteronomy 32:36 vs. Psalm 135:14 (divine judgment and compassion on servants)
- C. Psalm 136:17–22 vs. Psalm 135:10–12 (kings defeated and land heritage)
- D. Psalm 115:4–8 vs. Psalm 135:15–18 (detailed description of idol vanity)
- E. Creative synthesis: transforming scattered poetic and prose traditions into a new unified message

V. Key Synthesis Points on the Exodus Psalms

- A. Centrality of the Exodus tradition across OT, NT, and Revelation
- B. Shift from historical prose to poetic exaggeration and theological framing
- C. Absence of human intermediaries (Moses, Aaron) to elevate direct divine action
- D. Synthesis of creation motifs with historical redemption
- E. The Psalmist as a sophisticated biblical exegete working in a library setting