

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 9, Pagan Imagery, Zion and Psalm 100 20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. We're diving deep today into something kind of surprising in the Psalms. Well, yeah.

You see, they use all this imagery from, well, from ancient pagan myths, but they're using it to celebrate the God of Israel. Huh, that is interesting. Right.

Our main source for this deep dive is a lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke. He's a pretty well-known Old Testament scholar. I've heard of him.

So how can a book that's all about praising God borrow from these stories about other gods? Well, that's what we're going to find out. It's going to be really interesting. I'm intrigued already.

What's got you so fascinated? I think it's how the Psalms actually use those familiar stories to kind of elevate Yahweh. Yeah. Showing how powerful and unique he is compared to all those other gods.

Ah, I see. So it's like a Judo move, using their own myths against them. Yeah, exactly.

So let's start with Genesis, the creation account. We have that awesome image of God creating order out of chaos, that watery abyss, the Tohu vebohu. That primordial chaos.

Yeah, that's a powerful image. It is. And Dr. Waltke points out that lots of ancient cultures had their own myths about gods battling these sea monsters.

Like Leviathan. Leviathan, exactly. Or Rahab, to explain how the world came to be.

And the Psalms, they tap into that same powerful imagery. Divine victory over chaos. Yes.

But there is a key difference here. You see, in the Psalms, it's the God of Israel who's the ultimate victor. He's not just one God among many.

He's in a league of his own. Stands alone in his power and sovereignty. It's like they're taking those familiar stories and they're saying, yeah, but our God, he's the one who really tamed the chaos.

Exactly. It's not just retelling the stories. It's deliberately reframing them, you know.

And Dr. Waltke uses this really insightful analogy about light overcoming darkness. He says that darkness doesn't actually have any power of its own. It's simply the absence of light.

So it's like, imagine you open a door to a dark room. Right. And the light just floods in and poof, the darkness is gone.

I love that. And this ties directly into Psalms, right? Where God is often depicted as light, banishing the darkness, the chaos, and evil. Exactly.

He's the source of order, the one who brings light into the world. And this idea of light overcoming darkness has even deeper implications when you think about it, especially when we consider the Eschaton, the end times, described in the Book of Revelation. Oh, absolutely.

John envisions this future where there's no more sea, symbolizing the end of chaos and only the light of the Lamb, Christ. Wow. So it's this consistent thread woven throughout Scripture.

From Genesis to Revelation. God's light ultimately prevails. That's a powerful message.

Absolutely. A message of hope. And it's a thread that runs through the Psalms too.

They offer us this glimpse into a future where God's light will banish all darkness. Oh, hopeful. Now, Dr. Waltke brings up this fascinating contrast between two mountains: Mount Zion, God's dwelling place in Jerusalem.

And Mount Zaphon. Right. Mount Zaphon, the mythical home of Baal, the Canaanite god.

It's almost like this symbolic battle for supremacy. It is. And it's crucial to understand what holy really means here.

It means being set apart for a deity, right? But it doesn't automatically mean morally good. That's super important to remember. So like Baal and his consort, Anat, weren't exactly role models.

No, not at all. Dr. Walsky paints this, well, rather vivid picture. Anat, she's waiting in gore, and she's got severed heads as bracelets.

Oh, wow. Not exactly peaceful imagery. No, not at all.

And that detail really highlights how different those Canaanite deities were from the God of Israel. So by connecting God with Mount Zion, the Psalms deliberately contrast him with those other gods, making this powerful statement about his superiority. It's not just about the location, then.

No, it's deeper than that. It's about a fundamental difference in nature, in character. The God of Israel, he set apart, not just geographically, but morally and spiritually as well.

Powerful stuff. And speaking of powerful, Psalm 100 comes to mind. It's that joyous call for all the earth to praise God.

Just pure celebration. That's a great transition. Psalm 100, it's just bursting with joy and energy.

It really is. And Psalm 100 starts with this powerful command, you know, shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. It's like this global invitation.

Exactly. Everyone's invited to this party, but Dr. Waltke points out that this shout, it's not just some quiet little utterance, you know? More like a victory cry. Yeah.

A roar, a roar of joy and gratitude echoing across the whole earth. Wow. I love that.

Just letting loose and celebrating God. Right. But the Psalm doesn't stop there, right? Right.

It goes on to say, "Serve the Lord with gladness." Okay. So there's a difference between believing in God and actually serving him.

Right. Serving God means commitment, loyalty, obedience, aligning your life with his will, you know? It's like admiring a great chef from afar. Okay.

Versus working alongside them in the kitchen. I see what you're saying. So serving God is about getting your hands dirty.

Yes. Active participation, joining him in his work. And Dr. Waltke, he's quick to point out that this service, it's not supposed to be a drag.

It shouldn't feel like a chore. No, not at all. It should be joyful, fulfilling.

The Hebrew word for serve here can also mean worship. So we approach our service, our worship with delight, not like a, not like an obligation. Right.

We're invited to come before his presence with singing. Music, song, celebration, expressions of our joy and gratitude. Exactly.

And Psalm 100 reminds us why we have every reason to sing God's praises. It says, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his.

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. We belong to him. Yes.

And Dr. Waltke, he really stresses that word. No, he says it's not just intellectual. It's not just head knowledge.

No. Yeah. It's experiential.

You've got to encounter God personally. It's like reading about a beautiful sunset versus actually seeing it, you know? Yeah. Experiencing it.

Exactly. Experiencing God's presence, his love. And it makes you feel like you belong.

It does. Like you're part of something bigger. Like one of his sheep.

Yeah. Safe and protected. And then the Psalm shifts a bit.

It says, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. That reminds me of the temple, you know, where people gathered to worship.

Yes. And even though we don't have that physical temple today, the image still resonates. We approach God with grateful hearts, you know? Setting aside time to focus on him.

Exactly. And the Psalm gives us reasons for our praise. It says, "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever."

His faithfulness continues through all generations. Those are the foundational truths. Truths that we cling to, even when life gets tough.

Absolutely. God's goodness, his love, his faithfulness. Those never change.

So Psalm 100, it's more than just a poem. It's like a guide to joyful worship. It is.

It reminds us who God is, what he's done, why he deserves our praise. Worship is an act of love. Yeah.

An outpouring of joy, of gratitude. Exactly. Engages our whole selves.

Celebrating the God who made us. Redeemed us and loves us. Speaking of God's love, Dr. Waltke brings up something interesting about God's nature.

Oh, what's that? He talks about how God is unchanging, but he's also constantly revealing himself in new ways. Wait, so he's unchanging and constantly revealing himself. How does that work? Yeah, it's kind of a paradox, isn't it? It does seem like a contradiction.

Think of it like this. God is eternal, never changing in his essence. His character stays the same.

Right. But he's also active in history. He's involved with his people, revealing himself through actions, through words.

So God himself doesn't change, but our understanding of him deepens over time. Exactly. It's a journey of discovery.

We keep learning more about him. Yes. And that's where this idea of becoming comes in.

God doesn't change who he is, but he makes himself known to us in deeper and deeper ways. Like in the Old Testament, he reveals himself through covenants and prophets. Miracles.

And then in the New Testament, we see him most fully in Jesus. Yes. Jesus, the ultimate revelation of God.

The word made flesh. Showing us God's love and grace. It's amazing.

It really is. And this revelation doesn't stop there. It continues today.

As we study Scripture, pray, and experience God. He keeps revealing himself. He does.

He unfolds his character, his purposes. Peeling back the layers of an onion. That's a great way to put it.

And while we might not ever fully understand God, we can trust that he's drawing us closer. You know, revealing himself in ways we can grasp. It's amazing to think about how we're part of this story.

And Dr. Waltke, he also mentioned something else. He talks about how God is uniquely present in the temple. Yes.

But he's also present everywhere. Right. So how can that be? It is a bit of a paradox, but think of it like this.

God is everywhere. Like the air we breathe. We can't escape him.

No, but there are also special places, special times where he chooses to be more present. Like in the temple, people gathered there to worship. Exactly.

It was a place set apart. Consecrated. Yes.

And Dr. Waltke says this is where God's blessings flow most freely. Where people encounter his power and grace more directly. It's like the difference between a whisper and a shout.

God's always there, but sometimes he speaks louder. He makes himself more known. So if there's no physical temple today, where do we experience that kind of presence? Well, Dr. Waltke quotes Psalm 22.3. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One.

You are the praise of Israel. He inhabits the praises of his people. Wow.

It's not about location. It's about our hearts. When we gather, worship, and sing his praises, that's where he shows up.

It's like we create a space for him. We do. And I think this is true in our individual lives too.

When we make time for prayer, for reading scripture. Quiet reflection. That's where we create space for him to meet us.

Being aware of his presence, even in ordinary moments. And as we do that, we experience his blessings. His guidance, his peace.

Like opening the door to our hearts and inviting him in. Making a sanctuary for his presence. Wow.

We've covered so much in this deep dive. I mean, from God's victory over chaos to the power of his light, the contrast between those two mountains, Mount Zion and Mount Zaphon. And of course, that call to joyful worship in Psalm 100.

It's a lot to take in. Yeah. But I think it's helpful to kind of zoom out a bit, you know? See the bigger picture.

Yeah, exactly. What are the main takeaways we can carry with us from Dr. Waltke's lecture? Well, one of the biggest things for me is how the Psalms use those pagan myths. It's like they're turning them on their head.

Exactly. They're not afraid to use that familiar imagery, those stories. But they point to something much greater, you know? The God of Israel.

Yes. And it's a bold statement about God's power, his supremacy over all those other gods. It's not just about power, though, is it? No, you're right.

It's also about character. God's holiness, his love, his faithfulness. And that brings us to another key point.

That universal invitation to praise him. Yes. Psalm 100 makes it clear.

Everyone's invited to this party. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from. God's love and grace extend to everyone.

Exactly. And lastly, we're called to worship this God with joy. Not out of obligation, but out of love and gratitude.

Yes. Yeah. It should be a genuine outpouring of our hearts, engaging our whole selves.

It's like God loves a cheerful giver, right? You know? Exactly. He wants us to come to him with open hearts, celebrating all that he is, all that he's done for us. And it brings us back to that question we posed earlier.

What are those other masters in our lives, the things that are holding us back from truly serving God? You know, the things stealing our joy, dividing our hearts, keeping us from experiencing God's presence. It's a tough question to face, but a necessary one. Because if we want to experience that kind of joyful, exuberant worship that we see in the songs.

We have to let go of the things that are holding us back. And that, I think, is a perfect note to end on. I encourage you, as you think about all we've discussed, to go back and read Psalm 100 again.

Let that call to joyful praise sink in. Let it inspire you to seek God with everything you are, to offer him your praise, and to experience the fullness of his joy in your life. So well said.

And to all our listeners, thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the Psalms. We hope this has given you some new insights and that you'll keep exploring these ancient texts with fresh eyes and open hearts. Until next time, keep seeking, keep questioning, and keep diving deep.