

PSALM 135

This is one of the Hallelujah-psalms; that is the title of it, and that is the Amen of it, both its Alpha and its Omega.

I. It begins with a call to praise God, particularly a call to the “servants of the Lord” to praise him, as in the foregoing psalm (v. 1-3).

II. It goes on to furnish us with matter for praise. God is to be praised,

1. As the God of Jacob (v. 4).
2. As the God of gods (v. 5).
3. As the God of the whole world (v. 6, 7).
4. As a terrible God to the enemies of Israel (v. 8-11).
5. As a gracious God to Israel, both in what he had done for them and what he would do (v. 12-14).
6. As the only living God, all other gods being vanity and a lie (v. 15-18).

III. It concludes with another exhortation to all persons concerned to praise God (v. 19-21). In singing this psalm our hearts must be filled, as well as our mouths, with the high praises of God.

PSALM 135:1-4

AN INVITATION TO PRAISE

Here is,

1. The duty we are called to — to *praise the Lord*, to *praise his name*; *praise him*, and again *praise him*. We must not only thank him for what he has done for us, but praise him for what he is in himself and has done for others; take all occasions to speak well of God and to give his truths and ways a good word.

2. The persons that are called upon to do this — the *servants of the Lord*, the priests and Levites *that stand in his house*, and all the devout and pious Israelites that stand *in the courts of his house* to worship there, v. 2. Those

that have most reason to praise God who are admitted to the privileges of his house, and those see most reason who there behold his beauty and taste his bounty; from them it is expected, for to that end they enjoy their places. Who should praise him if they do not? 3. The reasons why we should praise God.

(1.) Because he whom we are to praise *is good*, and goodness is that which every body will speak well of. He is good to all, and we must give him the praise of that. His goodness is his glory, and we must make mention of it to his glory.

(2.) Because the work is its own wages: *Sing praises to his name, for it is pleasant*. It is best done with a cheerful spirit, and we shall have the pleasure of having done our duty. It is a heaven upon earth to be praising God; and the pleasure of that should quite put our mouths out of taste for the pleasures of sin.

(3.) Because of the peculiar privileges of God's people (v. 4): *The Lord hath chosen Jacob to himself*, and therefore Jacob is bound to praise him; for *therefore* God chose a people to himself that they might be unto him *for a name and a praise* (²⁴³¹Jeremiah 13:11), and *therefore* Jacob has abundant matter for praise, being thus dignified and distinguished. *Israel* is God's *peculiar treasure* above all people (⁴²⁹⁵Exodus 19:5); they are his *Segullah*, a people appropriated to him, and that he has a delight in, *precious in his sight and honourable*. For this distinguishing surprising favour, if the seed of Jacob do not praise him, they are the most unworthy ungrateful people under the sun.

⁴¹²⁵PSALM 135:5-14

MAJESTY AND GOODNESS OF GOD

The psalmist had suggested to us the goodness of God, as the proper matter of our cheerful praises; here he suggests to us the greatness of God as the proper matter of our awful praises; and on this he is most copious, because this we are less forward to consider.

I. He asserts the doctrine of God's greatness (v. 5): *The Lord is great*, great indeed, who knows no limits of time or place. He asserts it with

assurance, “I know that he is so; know it not only by observation of the proofs of it, but by belief of the revelation of it. I know it; I am sure of it; I know it by my own experience of the divine greatness working on my soul.” He asserts it with a holy defiance of all pretenders, though they should join in confederacy against him. He is not only above any god, but above all gods, infinitely above them, between him and them there is no comparison.

II. He proves him to be a great God by the greatness of his power, v. 6.

1. He has an absolute power, and may do what he will: *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he*, and none could control him, or say unto him, *What doest thou?* He does what he pleases, because he pleases, and gives not an account of any of his matters.

2. He has an almighty power and can do what he will; if he will work, none shall hinder.

3. This absolute almighty power is of universal extent; he does what he will *in heaven, in earth, in the seas*, and in *all the deep places* that are in the bottom of the sea or the bowels of the earth. The gods of the heathen can do nothing; but our God can do any thing and does do every thing.

III. He gives instances of his great power,

1. In the kingdom of nature, v. 7. All the powers of nature prove the greatness of the God of nature, from whom they are derived and on whom they depend. The chain of natural causes was not only framed by him at first, but is still preserved by him.

(1.) It is by his power that exhalations are drawn up from the terraqueous globe. The heat of the sun raises them, but it has that power from God, and therefore it is given as an instance of the glory of God that *nothing is hidden from the heat of the sun*, ¹⁵⁰⁶ Psalm 19:6. *He causes the vapours to ascend* (not only unhelped, but unseen, by us) from the earth, *from the ends of the earth*, that is, from the seas, by which the earth is surrounded.

(2.) It is he who, out of those vapours so raised, forms the rain, so that the earth is no loser by the vapours it sends up, for they are returned with advantage in fruitful showers.

(3.) Out of the same vapours (such is his wonderful power) he *makes lightnings or the rain*; by them he opens the bottles of heaven, and shakes the clouds, that they may water the earth. Here are fire and water thoroughly reconciled by divine omnipotence. They come together, and yet the water does not quench the fire, nor the fire lick up the water, as fire from heaven did when God pleased, ^{<1188>}1 Kings 18:38.

(4.) The same exhalations, to serve another purpose, are converted into winds, which blow where they list, from what point of the compass they will, and we are so far from directing them that we cannot tell whence they come nor whither they go, but God *brings them out of his treasuries* with as much exactness and design as a prudent prince orders money to issue out of his exchequer.

2. In the kingdoms of men; and here he mentions the great things God had formerly done for his people Israel, which were proofs of God's greatness as well as of his goodness, and confirmations of the truth of the scriptures of the Old Testament, which began to be written by Moses, the person employed in working those miracles. Observe God's sovereign dominion and irresistible power,

(1.) In bringing Israel out of Egypt, humbling Pharaoh by many plagues, and so forcing him to let them go. These plagues are called *tokens and wonders*, because they came not in the common course of providence, but there was something miraculous in each of them. They were *sent upon Pharaoh and all his servants*, his subjects; but the Israelites, whom God claimed for his servants, his son, his first-born, his free-born, were exempted from them, and no plague came nigh their dwelling. The death of the first-born both of men and cattle was the heaviest of all the plagues, and that which gained the point.

(2.) In destroying the kingdoms of Canaan before them, v. 10. Those that were in possession of the land designed for Israel had all possible advantages for keeping possession. The people were numerous, and warlike, and confederate against Israel. They were great nations. Yet, if a great nation has a meek and mean-spirited prince, it lies exposed; but these great nations had *mighty kings*, and yet they were all smitten and slain — *Sihon and Og*, and *all the kingdoms of Canaan*, v. 10, 11. No power of hell or earth can prevent the accomplishment of the promise of God when the time, the set time, for it has come.

(3.) In settling them in the land of promise. He that gives kingdoms to whomsoever he pleases gave Canaan to be a heritage to Israel his people. It came to them by inheritance, for their ancestors had the promise of it, though not the possession; and it descended as an inheritance to their seed. This was done long before, yet God is now praised for it; and with good reason, for the children were now enjoying the benefit of it.

IV. He triumphs in the perpetuity of God's glory and grace.

1. Of his glory (v. 13): *Thy name, O God! endures for ever.* God's manifestations of himself to his people have everlasting fruits and consequences. *What God doeth it shall be for ever,* ^{<1184>}Ecclesiastes 3:14. His name endures for ever in the constant and everlasting praises of his people; his memorial endures, has endured hitherto, and shall still endure throughout all generations of the church. This seems to refer to ^{<1185>}Exodus 3:15, where, when God had called himself *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, he adds, *This is my name for ever and this is my memorial unto all generations.* God is, and will be, always the same to his church, a gracious, faithful, wonder-working God; and his church is, and will be, the same to him, a thankful praising people; and thus his name *endures for ever.*

2. Of his grace. He will be kind to his people.

(1.) He will plead their cause against others that contend with them. *He will judge his people*, that is, he will judge for them, and will not suffer them to be run down.

(2.) He will not himself contend for ever with them, but will *repent himself concerning his servants*, and not proceed in his controversy with them; he will be entreated for them, or he will be comforted concerning them; he will return in ways of mercy to them and will delight to do them good. This verse is taken from the song of Moses, ^{<1186>}Deuteronomy 32:36.

^{<1185>}PSALM 135:15-21

EXHORTATIONS TO THANKSGIVING

The design of these verses is,

I. To arm the people of God against idolatry and all false worship, by showing what sort of gods they were that the heathen worshipped, as we had it before, ^(HBB)Psalm 115:4, etc.

1. They were gods of their own making; being so, they could have no power but what their makers gave them, and then what power could their makers receive from them? The images were the *work of men's hands*, and the deities that were supposed to inform them were as much the creatures of men's fancy and imagination.

2. They had the shape of animals, but could not perform the least act, no, not of the *animal* life. They could neither *see*, nor *hear*, nor *speak*, nor so much as *breathe*; and therefore to make them with *eyes*, and *ears*, and *mouths*, and *nostrils*, was such a jest that one would wonder how reasonable creatures could suffer themselves to be so imposed upon as to expect any good from such mock-deities.

3. Their worshippers were therefore as stupid and senseless as they were, both those that made them to be worshipped and those that trusted in them when they were made, v. 18. The worshipping of such gods as were the objects of sense, and senseless, made the worshippers sensual and senseless. Let our worshipping a God that is a Spirit make us spiritual and wise.

II. To stir up the people of God to true devotion in the worship of the true God, v. 19-21. The more deplorable the condition of the Gentile nations that worship idols is the more are we bound to thank God that we know better. Therefore,

1. Let us set ourselves about the acts of devotion, and employ ourselves in them: *Bless the Lord*, and again and again, *bless the Lord*. In the parallel place (^(HBB)Psalm 115:9-11), by way of inference from the impotency of idols, the duty thus pressed upon us is to *trust in the Lord*; here to *bless him*; by putting our trust in God we give glory to him, and those that depend upon God shall not want matter of thanksgiving to him. All persons that knew God are here called to praise him — the *house of Israel* (the nation in general), the *house of Aaron* and the *house of Levi* (the Lord's ministers that attended in his sanctuary), and all others *that feared the Lord*, though they were not of the house of Israel.

2. Let God have the glory of all: *Blessed be the Lord*. The tribute of praise arises *out of Zion*. All God's works do praise him, but his saints bless him; and they need not go far to pay their tribute, for he *dwells in Jerusalem*, in his church, which they are members of, so that he is always nigh unto them to receive their homage. The condescensions of his grace, in dwelling with men upon the earth, call for our grateful and thankful returns, and our repeated Hallelujahs.