

# PSALMS

## Chapter 115

*To Your Name Give Glory*

**Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! 2 Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” 3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. 6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. 7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. 8 Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. 9 O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. 11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. 12 The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; 13 he will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great. 14 May the LORD give you increase, you and your children! 15 May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth! 16 The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man. 17 The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence. 18 But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!**

**Ps 115** Praise of the Lord, the one true God, for his love and faithfulness toward his people. It was composed as a liturgy of praise for the temple worship. It may have been written for use at the dedication of the second temple (see Ezr 6:16) when Israel was beginning to revive after the disruption of the exile. See introduction to Ps 113. Structurally, the song advances in five movements involving a liturgical exchange between the people and temple personnel: (1) vv. 1–8: the people; (2) vv. 9–11: Levitical choir leader (the refrain perhaps spoken by the Levitical choir); (3) vv. 12–13: the people; (4) vv. 14–15: the priests; (5) vv. 16–18: the people. (CSB)

The psalm was traditionally used at the conclusion of the Passover meal as the worshipers prepared to return home. (LL)

Many date this psalm to after the exile, when Israel was at its lowest point. The psalmist encouraged Israel not to look to the outward manifestations of strength as did the idol worshipers, but to remember God’s steadfast love. (TLSB)

Format: V 1, glory to God; vv 2–3, God’s freedom; vv 4–8, idols’ weaknesses; vv 9–11, call to trust the Lord; vv 12–15, the Lord’s blessings; vv 16–18, the living bless the Lord. Changes between singular and plural pronouns likely represent antiphonal speaking or singing in the temple liturgy. (TLSB)

The 115<sup>th</sup> psalm is a psalm of thanks in which God is praised that he is the true, helping God. All other gods are vain idols that cannot help us. Therefore, we pray in verse 1, “Not to us, O Lord...,” that is, do not look at how religious and respectable we are, lest you no longer help us and we become like the heathen, a people without God, or again, as those who have a helpless god, as they accuse us. But rather look to your glory and to your name, that you are called and reputed to be a true, living God, abundant in help. For your name’s sake come to us, not for our name’s sake—that we are called God’s servants, workers, singers, fasters, and

well-doers-for such names the heathen also can have and are of no help. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

Ritual Acts	Ancient Use of Psalms in Worship References	Notes
<b>Pilgrimage</b>	Ps 120–34	Israelites were required to make annual pilgrimages to the sanctuary (cf Ex 23:17). Singing psalms was part of the journey.
<b>Procession</b>	Ps 24:7, 9; 48; 118:19–20; 132	Ps 132 may have been used as a reenactment of the moving of the ark of the covenant (2Sm 6).
<b>Dancing</b>	Ps 149:3; 150:4; cf Ex 15:20; Jgs 21:16–24; 2Sm 6:14, 16	Dance was not an individualistic action, as in modern times, but a liturgical act. (E.g., in Ex 32:19, Moses was angry at the dancing before the golden calf because the Israelites were performing a ritual dance as idol worship.) Israelites probably used ritual dances in processions to the sanctuary.
<b>Entrance Liturgies</b>	Ps 15; 24:3–6	Priests or Levites may have asked the questions found in these psalms. The people may have voiced the responses before entering the worship area.
<b>Invocation</b>	Ps 33:1; 111:1; 113:1; 146–50	These psalms seem to have opened a service of praise, prayer, or sacrifice. They invite the congregation to participate with the priests and Levites.
<b>Versicle and Response</b>	Ps 124; 129; 136	Ps 124:1 and 129:1 command, “Let Israel now say.” May be a cue from a priest or Levite for the congregation to recite a response.
<b>Choirs</b>	Ps 4; 5; 6; etc.	Many psalms were written for the choirmaster.
<b>Ceremonial Washings</b>	Ps 26:6; 51:7	Washing was a regular part of service at the temple because of the animal sacrifices, but it was

also an expression of forgiveness and purity.

**Offering**Ps 66:13–15

The Law of Moses does not prescribe words to accompany the sacrificial acts of the priests. The psalms seem to serve as “words of institution” for the sacrifices.

**Lament**/Ps 44; 60; 74; 79; etc.  
**Fasting**

In times of national crisis, and perhaps also during festivals, Israelites used lament psalms and fasted. (TLSB)

**115:1–8** Praise of God’s love and faithfulness toward his people, which silences the taunts of the nations. (CSB)

**115:1** *Not to us ... not to us.* Israel’s existence, and now her revival, is not her own achievement. (CSB)

The psalmist realizes that Israel’s identity as the people of God could lead to ungodly pride, to a kind of spiritual one ups-man-ship in which they would begin to take credit for their relationship with their Lord. As Christians, our relationship with God is one that is based on His mercy and love, not on any worth in us apart from Him. He alone is worthy of glory. (LL)

The great Passover celebration in the beautiful temple in Jerusalem could very easily tempt Israel to pride. What a great nation we are! What marvelous victories we have won! What a beautiful temple we have built! Israel did nothing to compel Pharaoh to release them. They did nothing to help Moses provide for them in the wilderness. They had been more of a hindrance than help. Their history was a story of the Lord’s love and faithfulness. For obvious reasons we often use this verse on such occasions as church anniversaries. It reminds us not to glory in our accomplishments, but to give glory to the Lord, who has given us all we have. When we contemplate the facilities of our church and our works of faith, we too say, “Not unto us, not unto us, but to your name be the glory.” (PBC)

*glory.* Psalmist responds to the taunt in v 2. Mankind glorifies itself in its idolatry. (TLSB)

*love...faithfulness.* The most common OT expression for God’s covenant benefits. (CSB)

Luther: “The coming of Christ into the flesh was given out of the pure mercy of the promising God, and was neither bestowed by the merits of human nature nor denied by demerits” (AE 11:396). (TLSB)

**115:2** *Where is their God?* The taunt of the nations when Israel is decimated by natural disasters (see Joel 2:17) or crushed by enemies, especially when Judah is destroyed and the temple of God razed (see 79:10; Mic 7:10). (CSB)

**115:3** *is in heavens.* Sits enthroned (see 113:5) in the “highest heavens” (v. 16). . (CSB)

The true God cannot be contained in human works. (TLSB)

Even as Christ has ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things, so this claim is the equivalent of saying: He sits enthroned on high, where only he may sit who rules all things in heaven and on earth. (Leupold)

*does all that he pleases.* If Israel is decimated or destroyed, it is God's doing; it is not his failure or inability to act, nor is it the achievement of the idols the nations worship. And when Israel is revived, that is also God's doing, and no other god can oppose him. (CSB)

Chemnitz: "He absolutely does foreknow what is going to happen, and yet He is a totally free agent. For all things which He wills He does" (*LTh* 1:207). (TLSB)

This does not connote caprice or unpredictability. It assumes that what he pleases is always good and perfect as asserts that he infallibly carries out his desires. (Leupold)

**115:4–7** Whatever glory and power the false gods are thought to have (as symbolized in the images made to represent them), they are mere figments of human imagination and utterly worthless (see 135:15–18; Isa 46:1–7). (CSB)

**115:4** Substance of idols is natural, but their form is the mere reflection of human false teaching. (TLSB)

**115:8** *Those who make them.* The taunting nations (cf. v. 2). (CSB)

Luther: "A remarkable love of one's own powers does all these things, a love which changes the lover into the beloved" (AE 11:399). (TLSB)

Idolatry is not harmless; it diverts people from serving the living God and demoralizes them to live on the same base level as their corrupt gods. Those gods were lifeless and ineffective; and their use made the devotees empty and degraded (Is. 44:19). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

*like them.* Powerless and ineffectual. For a graphic elaboration of this truth see Isa 44:9–20. (CSB)

**115:9–11** The call to trust in the Lord, not in idols (see v. 8). For the same groupings see 118:2–4; see also 135:19–20. (CSB)

Israel, her priests, and even proselytes (first mentioned in 1Ki 8:41–43) fear the Lord and trust in Him. (TLSB)

To the people, priests and Gentile God-fearers (LL)

**115:11** *You who fear the Lord.* Perhaps proselytes (see 1Ki 8:41–43; Ezr 6:21; Ne 10:28). (CSB)

**115:12–13** The people's confession of trust. – The attitude of the speakers in the psalm changes. The note of assurance now becomes strong. (Leupold)

God's promise to bless those who trust in Him is affirmed. These verses may have been chanted by the people. (TLSB)

**115:14–15** The priestly blessing. (CSB)

A blessing is pronounced. These verses may have been chanted by the priests. (TLSB)

**115:14** *give you increase*. In numbers, wealth and strength (cf. Ecc 2:9: “became greater by far than”—lit. “increased more than”). (CSB)

For one major disadvantage of the nation of Israel after its re-establishment was that it was few in number. Healthy growth in numbers was in OT times always regarded as a signal blessing from God. This marked a basic need of the nation. (Leupold)

**115:16–18** The people’s concluding doxology. (CSB)

**115:16** *heavens ... earth*. The one the exclusive realm of the exalted, all-sovereign God; the other the divinely appointed place for man, where he lives under God’s rule and care, enjoys his abundant blessings (vv. 12–13) and celebrates his praise (v. 18). (CSB)

People exist on earth and have some understanding of it. Human idols are bound to earth. God’s existence covers all realms, even the realm of heaven, where His perfect will operates without hindrance. (TLSB)

**115:17** *dead do not*.† The dead no longer live in “the earth” (v. 16) but have descended to the silent realm below, where, as far as human experience goes, blessings are no longer enjoyed and praise is absent (see notes on 6:5; 30:1). (CSB)

Death ends our bodily life as God intended it; our mouths, intended for praise, fall silent. (TLSB)

**115:18** *forevermore*. Our praise of God will continue somehow forever. Rv explains this more fully in its teaching of the resurrection of the Last Day. (TLSB)

**Psalm 115** Idols are essentially an outward representation of human imagination. Nothing could be more fleeting or self-glorifying. Through the promises of His blessings, God calls His people beyond imagination to the truth of His existence. • Lord, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word. Give us faith to hold fast to the truth, and grant us Your blessings. Amen. (TLSB)