

Mosaic

- Psalm 135:1** Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD, give
praise, O servants of the LORD,
² who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of
our God!
³ Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is
pleasant!
⁴ For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own
possession.
⁵ For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all
gods.
⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in
the seas and all deeps.
⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who
makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his
storehouses.
⁸ He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of
beast;
⁹ who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh
and all his servants;
¹⁰ who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings,
¹¹ Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the
kingdoms of Canaan,
¹² and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.
¹³ Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD,
throughout all ages.
¹⁴ For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his
servants.
¹⁵ The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human
hands.

- ¹⁶ They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see;
¹⁷ they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths.
¹⁸ Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.
¹⁹ O house of Israel, bless the LORD! O house of Aaron, bless the LORD!
²⁰ O house of Levi, bless the LORD! You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!
²¹ Blessed be the LORD from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem!
Praise the LORD!"

Psalms 135

Tiny Pieces of Stone

HUQOQ IS A TINY ancient village located 2.5 miles from the western edge of the Sea of Galilee and just over four miles from Capernaum. Mentioned in **Joshua 19:34**, it has been inhabited off and on for over 3,500 years. In 2011, an ancient synagogue was uncovered. The structure dates to the 12th-13th centuries A.D., but it was built upon the ruins of an earlier synagogue that was 800 years older. In the older part of the building, fantastic mosaics have been and continue to be unearthed.

A **mosaic** is a picture produced by arranging together small colored pieces of hard material like stone, tile, or glass. Of the many mosaics discovered here, they depicted Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, the Egyptians being destroyed by the Red Sea, Samson, and Jonah. Each frame is a carefully and beautifully designed patchwork stone art that gives insights into much that was previously unknown about Jewish worship during these periods in this part of Israel. The fact that synagogues all over the ancient world have mosaics like this was probably justified in their minds by the command for images of things like trees, animals, and angels (all Garden of Eden imagery) to be built into the structures of the more ancient tabernacle and temples.

			
Donkeys in Noah's Ark Mosaic, Huqoq, Galilee	Wood Worker in the Tower of Babel, Huqoq	Fish Swallowing Soldier Parting of the Red Sea, Huqoq	Samson Carrying the Gaza Gate, Huqoq

Whatever you make of these decorative mosaics that were clearly part of ancient Jewish worship after the destruction of the temple, before us today is what many have called the

Great Mosaic of the Psalter: [Psalm 135](#). [Spurgeon](#) explains almost 150 years ago:

It is mainly made up of selections from other Scriptures. It has been called a mosaic, and compared to a tessellated pavement. At the outset, its first two verses are taken from Ps 134; while the latter part of verse 2 and the commencement of verse 3 put us in mind of Ps 116:19; and verse 4 suggests Deut 7:6. Does not verse 5 remind us of Ps 95:3? As for verse 7, it is almost identical with Jer 10:13, which may have been taken from it. The passage contained in verse 13 is to be found in Ex 3:15. and verse 14 in Deut 32:36. The closing verses, 8 to 12, are in Ps 136. From verse 15 to the end the strain is a repetition of Ps 115. This process of tracing the expressions to other sources might be pushed further without straining the quotations; the whole Psalm is a compound of many choice extracts, and yet it has all the continuity and freshness of an original poem. The Holy Spirit occasionally repeats himself; not because he has any lack of thoughts or words, but because it is expedient for us that we hear the same things in the same form. Yet, when our great Teacher uses repetition, it is usually with instructive variations, which deserve our careful attention.¹

¹ C. H. [Spurgeon](#), *The Treasury of David: Psalms 120-150*, vol. 6 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 182.

Indeed, there is so much material that is from other parts of the Scripture that you almost, *not quite but almost*, have the entire thing duplicated if you reprint those other passages in order (see the chart below). Every verse has some counterpart in another place in Scripture, most or perhaps all of which came before this song was written. But the Prince of Preachers said exactly what I think about why God has had this anonymous psalm writer do this, so I won't say anything more about it.

Psalm 135	Other References
¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD, give praise, O servants of the LORD,	Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! (Ps 113:1)
² who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God!	...in the courts of the house of the LORD. (116:19)
³ Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant!	Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. (107:1)
⁴ For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession.	The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession... (Deut 7:6)
⁵ For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.	I know that the LORD is greater than all gods. (Ex 18:11)
⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.	Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Ps 115:3)
⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.	When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (Jer 10:13)

<p>⁸ He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of beast;</p>	<p>He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their strength. (Ps 105:36)</p>
<p>⁹ who in your midst,</p>	<p>in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!" (Ps 116:19)</p>
<p>O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants;</p>	<p>They performed his signs among them and miracles in the land of Ham. (Ps 105:27; cf. 28-32)</p>
<p>¹⁰ who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings,</p>	<p>See Ps 136:17-22 for these three verses.</p>
<p>¹¹ Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan,</p>	<p>Deut 3:21</p>
<p>¹² and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.</p>	
<p>¹³ Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages.</p>	<p>May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! (Ps 72:17)</p>
<p>¹⁴ For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.</p>	<p>For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants... (Deut 32:36)</p>
<p>¹⁵ The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.</p>	<p>Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.</p>
<p>¹⁶ They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see;</p>	<p>They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.</p>
<p>¹⁷ they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths.</p>	<p>They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.</p>
	<p>They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.</p>
<p>¹⁸ Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.</p>	<p>Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. (Ps 115:4-8 ESV)</p>
<p>¹⁹ O house of Israel, bless the LORD!</p>	<p>O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.</p>
<p>O house of Aaron, bless the LORD!</p>	
<p>²⁰ O house of Levi, bless the LORD!</p>	<p>O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.</p>
<p>You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!</p>	<p>You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. (Ps 115:9-11, cf. 118:2-4)</p>
<p>²¹ Blessed be the LORD from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!</p>	<p>I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. (Zech 8:3)</p>

Psalm 135 begins what we should call [the last section of the Psalter](#), a 16-song set that follows the same pattern we found in [Psalms 105-118](#). It begins with two historical psalms ([135-136](#)), followed by a song remembering the returning to Israel from Babylon ([137](#)). Next comes a set of Psalms of David ([138-145](#)), the last of which is an acrostic psalm ([145](#)). Then, Book V and indeed the entire psalter comes to a conclusion with five Hallelujah Psalms.²

Parallelism of Psalms in Book V		
105-106	Historical Psalms	135-36
107	Psalm for the Exiles Returning from Babylon	137
108-110	Psalms of/for David	138-145
111, 112	Alphabetic Psalms	145
113-118	Hallelujah Psalms	146-150 ³

Psalm 135 is [a song of praise](#), which comes on the heels of the *Psalms of Ascent* ([Ps 120-134](#)). As we saw, those songs seem to have been placed at this point in the Psalter, to be a kind of [easy reference](#) in an ancient hymnbook which was used by the post-exilic Jews who had returned to Israel from Babylon and had been part of rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah finally gathered them together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles around 445 B.C. and those songs seem to have been part of their liturgical week-long celebration.

² Chart taken from the sermon on Psalm 107.

While we didn't say much about this in the first songs of Book V, we did say a little regarding how those songs may very well have been placed at an earlier point in order to celebrate something similar, perhaps Passover around 517 B.C., when Ezra had rebuilt the temple.³ Now, given the symmetry of the organization of the song, such things as their being placed as morning/evening songs one after the other (nearly all of the songs in this fifth book are like this), their content, and other factors, some have proposed that this last set of songs may have functioned in a similar way, perhaps for a different year of the Feast of Tabernacles, or something else.⁴

As we have taken this approach for the previous set, we won't say a lot more about this in the coming weeks, but it is good to keep it in mind, if for no other reason that it can help you appreciate how these songs may have worked together as a book or related Psalms to help advance the worship of the LORD after he had been so kind and

³ For example, [Goulder](#), 316.

⁴ In fact, the Talmud (B. Pesah 118a) says that "[The Great Hallel](#)" is to be sung after the last cup of blessing at the Passover, just after Psalm 118. The Great Hallel is identified as Psalm 136, but sometimes 135 is included among it. We will look more at this next time. [See esp. Excursus, "The So-Called Great Hallel," in *Hermeneia* vol. 3 of the Psalms, p. 491 and the quote on the Great Hallel.](#)

generous to the Jews after their treachery against him for so many centuries prior.

But that takes me to the basic content of Psalm 135. [What does Psalm 135 celebrate?](#) What is it praising God for? Well, it praises God for numerous things that he has done, and what the Jews of those return-from-captivity days were doing was therefore appropriating those facts about God into their own modern worship. I believe, we must do the same, and for me, given the content of this song, I find it both personally joyous and [personally fascinating](#) to sing and preach about it. I hope to be able to share [a little of why](#) that is as we go along.

How so? To get at this, looking at the structure of the song can be helpful. It seems pretty clearly to be our old friend, the [chiasm](#) at work again. Here it is in an easy to grasp and more hopefully *remember* form that I came up with:

- A. Praise (1-3)
- B. Possession (4)
- C. Power of God (5-9)
- D. Peoples Kings (10-11)
- E. Peculiar People (12)
- F. Perpetual Name (13)
- E¹. Peculiar People (14)
- D¹. People's Idols (15)
- C¹. Powerlessness of Idols (16-17)
- B¹. Possession (18)
- A¹. Praise (19-21)

Looking at it like this can help us see the main point or verse (its center—**vs. 13**). And It can help us break down the teaching into easy sets of verses, as well as see the parallels between various parts of the song, which are clearly given to show a deep contrast between God and the idols of the peoples.

As it progresses, it adds new teachings every few verses. Here is where I find it so personally remarkable. It begins at the **temple**, praising God. It then moves to the doctrine of **election** and his possession of his people, the **Sovereignty** of God on their behalf (especially in redemptive history), and the great **love** he has for them. This is all contrasted with a kind of anti-election doctrine where those who do not know the LORD have a kind of **possession** (pun kind of intended) of the gods, gods who **do nothing** whatsoever for their people, and who show **no love** at all for them. At the center is **the great Name** of the LORD who is the focal point of the song, of Israel's worship, and of everything in the entire Bible.

As it regards these things, let me ask you a question. **Have you ever had anything in your life that captivated you so fully that you were consumed for months or even years**

with virtually nothing else? I can name many things in mine. In the non-religious realm, I think of golf or climbing mountains or pursuing and loving my wife. None of those things has ever diminished, only grown; though, age and circumstances of life make it so I can't pursue them all every second as I would like.

But [the way I'm hard-wired](#), I can say the same thing about matters of religion. I know we are all different as Christians in this regard, and not everyone is wired to be fanatical about theology, so maybe for you it is different kinds of good things, such as helping the poor or having special times of worship or showing hospitality or praying or whatever.

But for me, it is theology. I guess it always has been. Theology is how I get to know God. It has never been an academic pursuit for me, but [a personal one](#); one whereby I come to know and understand the God who has saved me. The end for me is never anything less than loving him more and helping others to do the same.

What I find so interesting is that, at different points in my life, I've found myself almost obsessive with trying to understand some very different doctrines (although, I'll also say that at each step along the way, moving from one

doctrine to the next has always been related to the one before it in some way).

Like many who are arrested by it, probably my first real theological preoccupation was thinking about the doctrine of [predestination](#). I began to move forward into time and history by studying biblical [temples](#), two of which are in the first two chapters of the Bible. This developed into learning about the divine council, which is also in those chapters. That took me to a study of [giants](#) (definitely related, literally, but also because I also like x-files kinds of things) in the Bible which expanded into the broader world of the [supernatural](#). This has lead me at the present time to deep reflections on the greatest Supernatural Character in the OT: The Angel of the LORD, who is also called many things like the Word and the [Name](#) of God, who is always surrounded by the Glory of the Holy Spirit, and whose [works](#) are multitudinous and magnificent. Of course, along the way there have been other almost side-pursuits which were always related to the larger one. Things like [baptism](#), [creationism](#), and [God's loving kindness](#), especially towards his people.

Now, there are a LOT of other things you could think about in theology. This is maybe 2% of what you will find

in a systematic theology book. Thing is, you could make an argument that not one, not two, but literally **every one of these** obsessions of my own personal pursuit of Knowing God **shows up in Psalm 135!** When I started thinking about this, I was kind of dumb-struck. The reasons I have been interested in these things have, again, never been speculative or abstract. I actually don't really try to spend a whole lot of time thinking about the philosophical abstractions behind doctrines. That's too impractical for me and moves me too far afield from revelation. But I've been interested in them in order to help me know this God better.

In the song, these same truths are given to help not just me, but all of God's people, worship him more consistently, more faithfully, more corporately, and more tenaciously. This is exactly my reason for having studied them these last 30 years. Together, they create this **incredible theological mosaic** that paints a clearer picture of a God who is alone worthy to be worshiped and called God. And this is exactly why I've come to church today to be with each of you.

What does God look like? I'm not talking about physically. He is a spirit and no one can even look upon God. But when you understand the things in this song, then you will know with your mind's eye what God looks like. For

you will come to see what kind of a being he truly is. No speculation. No ideas of man. Just pure self-disclosure of God from other parts of the Bible put together into a worship song that celebrates the One True God for who he is and what he has done.

So let's turn to the song and as we do, allow me tell you how these things have affected me over the years, even as we try to get a grasp of how they are laid out for us in the song. We will look at the various doctrines in the song and then try to put together a mosaic of God out of them.

Psalm 135: Putting the Stones Together

Temple Stone (1-3)

The song, which is anonymous, begins with three *hallels*: Praise the LORD! Praise the Name of the LORD ... Praise the LORD (1, 3). In this way, the last section of the Psalter begins and ends with the same word (see Ps 150:6). This teaches you the great heights to which we have come as we have travelled through so many ups and downs in this Inspired Song-Book.

And where we have come now is to the temple. “Give praise, O servants of the LORD, who stand in the house of

the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God” (1-2). As this is a corporate song, the idea seems to be that the priests (the servants who attend the house) and the people (who come to the outer courts) are to praise God together. There is no hierarchy in worship. All are level and equals before God.

Why have they come to praise? Because **the LORD is good; and his name is pleasant**. So many people do not understand God in this way. They have this idea of God that he is a tyrant, a despot, a dictator, someone who seeks revenge, who is out to get them, who won't stop until they are destroyed and all happiness is removed from the world. But here we learn that the reason to sing is because the LORD is good. **Good** is the opposite of evil. It is the opposite of bad. All that is good in this world is defined by who God is. And more, his name is **pleasant**. Like a cool spring day, or a lovely flower, or the mountains after a rain, God is pleasant—pleasing and gentle, kind and fair. There is more here, but we will wait until the end to see it.

Instead, I want to focus on the place of their worship—**the temple**. Why come here? And why have I been so fascinated with this over the years. My reason is simple. Temple is a way to understand the entirety of biblical

revelation. God always makes temples, God always comes to temples, and temples are the place where he is to be found in his special, saving presence (but also in wrath if one does not know better), and therefore, they are dangerously safe, beautifully awesome and fearful, like the Lion who dwells therein.

What are these temples? Isaiah says heaven is God's throne, earth is his footstool. This means [the universe](#) is the place where he sits in his temple over all things. From there, he patterned [Eden](#) to be a temple; [Ararat](#) and the [Ark](#) of Noah were both temples; the [Promised Land](#) is a temple; [Sinai](#) was a temple; the [tabernacle](#) and [temple](#) were of course both temples. All of them have similar design—three tiers or layers which get progressively more sanctified the closer in you get to the presence of God who dwells in the very center and makes it most holy. They all have food, all have water for washing, all have light and smoke or clouds to emulate the heavens that are far away. In short, they all depict the heavenly reality after which they are each patterned.⁵

⁵ For more, see the middle section of my book *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism*.

But the greatest thing of all about the temple is that it is not an obscure, esoteric mystery that only the illuminated and initiated and educated can understand. For the temple of God in its ultimate form is not a thing, but a **person**. It is **Christ Jesus** who tabernacled among us and destroyed the temple in three days and then rebuilt it immediately. Even more, he is creating a **Church-Temple** with himself as the chief cornerstone, such that wherever that church is, either corporately or individually, he dwells therein through his Holy Spirit who united us to Christ like stones are united to the larger structure as one. This is the place they come to worship. This is the place God inhabits.

If we were to take these verses and turn them into stones that fit into a **mosaic**, these stones might depict the beautiful robes of God, his palace, and his censer which blesses and purifies everything it touches.

So this is the place he changes and sanctifies and purifies and makes beautiful, all at his own doing and good pleasure, which we will turn and look at next. But first I must ask, is the temple of God a thing of your great delight and affection, or is it something that exposes your desire to worship how you want, where you want, when you want, on your own terms rather than coming to place where God

dwells? If so, come to the temple and see how good and pleasant it is.

Election Stone (4)

The song next turns to consider the glorious doctrine of **election**. Like God's goodness, many people have twisted, perverted views of election, to the point that they despise the doctrine as something invented by Lucifer in the pit of hell. It is no small thing how angry and bent out of shape many get when they think about election and predestination.

And yet, for anyone—and I mean literally anyone who understands even a glimmer of how wicked, sinful, rebellious, undeserving, and unwilling to come to God they are—there is no greater ointment to a wound, oil to a burn, pillow to a head than this doctrine.

Behold. “**For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession**” (4). First **Jacob**, then **Israel**. The language is deliberate. Jacob was the scoundrel of the book of Genesis. His very name means deceiver. He is the embodiment of total depravity. He came out of the womb grasping at his brother's heel. But God came to Jacob, met

him, spoke to him, *wrestled* with him, blessed him. And Jacob wasn't even looking for him.

Because *God* chose Jacob. From the foundations of the world he chose him. And if he didn't, Jacob would have gone to hell. That's why the doctrine is so precious to so many. They know that it is a doctrine that *saves* people who were not seeking after him. They know that it shows his goodness, and they know it to be a pleasant thing. They know and are thankful that it is based on nothing they have done. This is the first and best reason why I ever cared about studying predestination. I wanted to know why God would do such a thing, and when I discovered it was because I was so sinful I would never come to him, I burst forth in perpetual praise of my Sovereign Creator who saw fit to save a wretch like me.

If we turned election into stones for our [Mosaic](#), perhaps they might form the shape of an Alpha and Omega, as we see in so many older paintings. For this is the doctrine that touches upon the beginning and end, before man was to when and why he will live forever. And it only comes from the one who is the Alpha and Omega himself.



Israel is now praising God for his electing love too. The question is, **are you**, or does the doctrine lay you bare, exposing your ungrateful rebellion for what it is in the anger and resentment it stirs up in your heart? If so, humble yourself and see how this mighty God actually overcomes your sin with his grace alone.

Sovereign Power Stone (5-6)

Might is the focus of the next two verses. “**For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases**” (5-6a). First, notice how this connects to the previous. It does so in two ways. The most obvious is **God’s power**. First God chooses, then God does. The second is not apparent to many, because they do not understand the way of things. Calvin begins to get at it when he says, “**It was only the children of Abraham who were favored with the knowledge of God at that time, and were capable of praising him, the Psalmist directs them to the fact of their having been chosen by God to be his peculiar people,**

as affording matter for thanksgiving.”⁶ Given what I know of Calvin’s theology, I don’t think he is aware of just how true this is. It has to do with the “gods.”

The contrast is between Lord (*Adonai*) and lesser *elohim*. *Adonai* is the name for Christ in **Psalm 110:1**. To put it a different way, the Son of God is above all the heavenly sons of God. Like the other two doctrines, this became a sort of obsession of mine. It is called **the divine council**. The divine council, which we saw in **Psalm 82:1**, is the heavenly court of beings (Calvin calls them “angels” in his only half-way understood discussion) who rule over the affairs of the cosmos. Calvin rightly applies the terms “**principalities and powers**” to them. These are terms of authority and rule, like thrones or rulers or princes or other such terms the Bible uses for them.

You see, God had given the nations over to darkness at Babel, by leaving mankind to fend for themselves under the rule and authority of these creatures. All the ancients knew it, including the Bible in many places. But just as the true light was about to be totally snuffed out, the Lord came to Abraham, and chose him out of them, taking possession of

⁶ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 171.

the man and his offspring, taking them to be his people and he their God. Finally, the One True God would be worshiped among men again. This is the link to the previous verse and this one with the gods.

Are you someone who acknowledges the Bible's repeated emphasis that the gods are real, that they are created, angelic entities who interact in the world of men? Or do you scoff at the idea, not realizing that you are calling God a liar about them, which itself undermines the story of our first parent, the real presence of Satan in this world, and prevents you from gaining a full appreciation that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but the principalities in invisible places? Do not scoff at the word, for it knows reality and it tells you about all of it in order to help you understand God and his ways, especially in your salvation and sanctification.

Creator Stone (7)

What God pleases to do is to choose some among all living in hopeless misery to find the Light of Christ himself. But he does more, for his power is beyond comprehension. Again Calvin, “**The immensity of God is what none can comprehend.**” So just in case we think we have it all figured

out with ourselves and him, the song takes us out, far far away from ourselves, to the very creation, the thing which men today say was an accident of billions of years of time and chance and chaos resulting in all meaning and beauty and purpose (a leap of faith if ever there was one).

Again, **creation** is one of those things I've read a lot about. I'm guessing I'm not alone here. It fascinates me. Mostly, because I wasn't there and I can't even begin to comprehend it. The more I read, the less I feel I actually know about it. This is part of its purpose. It isn't there to make you feel like you are Einstein. It is there to make you feel like an ant. So many people think they've got it all figured out, this creation thing. The only reply to that is the one God gave to the most righteous, presumably brilliant person on earth. "Where were you when?" "Tell me, you who know..." Be humbled by God and his creation, not arrogant about it.

The verses in the psalm now look kind of like those in Job. "...in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses" (7). **Weathermen** know a lot about how things work. This was written in a time when these things

were virtual mysteries. Evaporation, electricity, the jet stream—these things were very poorly understood, if at all.

But even knowing about them, how good are we at predicting them just a couple of days out, yet alone the laughable idea that we can do it 100 years out? Much more, how good are we at creating such things? We try (think CERN or seeding clouds), but compared to God, there is no comparison. Touching on the previous verses, it was the gods who were said to control the weather: Thor, Zeus, Baal, and perhaps Satan himself ([Luke 10:18](#)), they were all the gods of the storm and lightning. As we will soon see, whatever power they have, it is impotent compared to Yahweh.

If we were to take this power over creation and turn it into stones for our Mosaic, I think I would choose this very storm, which God himself uses to depict his coming in on Sinai and other places. For it shows his power and his sovereignty over the creation.⁷

Divine Warrior Stone (8-11)

⁷ I mentioned baptism, another topic I've looked into a lot. Tertullian and others said that baptism was there in Genesis 1:2. Certainly the waters of creation and the storm and rain from this verse are not ideas terrible far from one another.

We turn next to God's power harnessed in what I would depict through our stones as a great sword unsheathed. "He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of beast; who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants; who struck down many nations and killed mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan" (8-11). Here we have depicted two specific stories, and after each comes a more general comment.

First, it is the Egyptians, the great power of the ancient world who held Israel in slavery and bondage. Of all the things God did ("signs and wonders"), one specific is brought out. He took the firstborn of Egypt. This is the 10th and final plague, the one that broke Pharaoh's back, which God did to free his people, but also to teach them that the firstborn belongs to him. After all, Christ is the Firstborn among many brothers.

This action is depicted by Moses as being carried out by "a man of war" (Ex 15:3). It is through The Angel of the LORD who travelled in those days in a cloud and pillar of fire, watching over Israel, guarding her from in front and behind. Joshua later met him on a certain road. And he revealed himself as The Captain of the LORD's Armies

(Josh 5:14). When he saw him, he has a sword in his hand. Later, in the days of David, with sword unsheathed, he took out 185,000 Assyrians and over 70,000 Israelites in two different episodes (2Sa 24:16-17; 2Kg 19:35). He did these things in a single night, such is his great power. Such is the power of Christ the Word who rides the White Horse and comes to judge the living and the dead. This power of God through his Captain of the Host is one you do not want to play with.

Just ask those in the second episode. For they were the greatest of all the ancient men. They were the giants old, the men of renown. Most people have no idea that **giants** actually play a fairly significant role in the story of the OT. They are in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and the prophets. They were known to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Esther, and many more. It isn't just Goliath who was a giant. He himself had four brothers, which is probably why David carried those five stones when he went to slay the behemoth.

In my longer (still unpublished) catechism of the supernatural I have a question. *Who is the most famous giant in the Bible?* Answer? *Goliath is the most famous in our day, Og was more famous in Jewish times, Anak was famous in the land of*

Canaan, and Nimrod was the most famous giant of the ancient world. Og and his brother/cousin Sihon are mentioned here in the Psalm (and also the next, which is no accident).

Og is mentioned much more often than Goliath. He is in Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Kings, Nehemiah, and the Psalms and perhaps Ezekiel and Revelation (“Gog”). One glance at Jewish folklore will show you that he was clearly the most renowned giant in Jewish thought. Some said he was the last remaining directly descended giant from Genesis 6, that he was born before the Flood, and that he survived it by cutting a deal with Noah and hitching a ride on his ark. Moses depicts his bed as being something like 13 feet long.

Sihon is never said to be a giant, but he *is* called an Amorite, and as Amos prophesies, “It was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks” (Amos 2:9). What is the role these guys play in the OT? They are the archvillains of the story, the very seed of the serpent through the unnatural fall of the sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4. They are the Nephilim, also called the Rephaim and Anakim and Zamzummim and other fearsome titles after their great leaders and terrible attributes. Why are they here and why

should you care? Why does it matter that they were destroyed? Because each one that was destroyed was a continuation of the promise given to Eve that he would bruise the heel, but her seed would crush his head.

Chosen People Loved Stone (12-14)

The center of the song focuses on **the love God has for his people**. Again, in more recent years, I've been focused on this. It began for me when I began to contemplate Christ's multi-layered work at redemption in the atonement. I came to realize that the way I grew up was in fact correct. God does have **a general love** for all mankind. He makes the rain fall on the just and unjust. He opens his arms and weeps over those who killed the prophets because they wouldn't come to him for forgiveness. God so loved the world.

But what I didn't grow up with was **a special love** that God has for his own people. This love is what brought him to elect them in the first place. It is what caused Christ to die for his sheep and for the church in such a way that they would be effectually brought to him when the Spirit called them. This love is demonstrated in these verses **first** in his giving of the land of Canaan (a land full of evil giants) to Israel for their heritage. This is rooted in the covenant

promises God gave to Abraham, that he would inherit the land. God never elects a people only to leave them empty handed. This land is but a foretaste of the Eternal Beulah land so longed for by the old American slaves, the land that belongs to the saints in the Kingdom Come. For Paul says the promise was the Abraham would inherit **the world** (**Rom 4:13**).

The **second** comes in **vs. 13** that he will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants. What glorious good news this is! Returning to election, to which this act is so closely tied, those who know themselves to be great sinners know that unless God vindicates them and has compassion on them, they are undone. Even the great Isaiah found that out, once he went into the heavenly temple in Isaiah 6 and cried, “**Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips. I am undone.**” To not understand God’s love for you as a Christian has to be the ultimate disaster, for this above all other things changes a person’s life for the better, and it necessarily causes them to become more like Him. You are what you worship, and as we will see shortly, this works in more ways than one.

This vindication and eternal inheritance sandwiches the very center verse of the poem. “**Your Name, O LORD,**

endures forever, your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages” (13). We’ll only focus on [the renown](#) here, though it is logically related to the idea of a name, for those with great names are always men of renown. God has gained renown both through his fantastic defeats of his enemies and through his glorious salvation of his elect. Both gain him renown, especially when he not only saves his precious loved ones, but gives them such bountiful gifts as these. Is there a question why I would fixate on such doctrines? Do you? Is the love of God precious to you, and is that reflected in the way you love your neighbor as yourself?

If I had to put these stones into our [Mosaic](#), perhaps it would be the background of a [land flowing with milk and honey](#), the Jordan in view, tables full of good food, and a court scene where the judge throws down the gavel and says, “Not guilty!” What a scene we are starting to develop in our minds.

Impotent gods Chisel (15-17)

For a few verses, the story turns. The poem makes its way back out as it begins to contrast the works and power of God with those of the gods. It does so in the typical prophetic style of [mockery and satire](#). Having discussed the

gods, it now refers to them as “idols.” Not that it doesn’t believe angels/*elohim* exist, but that it wants you to know what their power is like compared to God’s.

“The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths” (15-17). This has been taken from an earlier psalm (though, I’m glad he leaves out the noses that can’t smell part).

Contrast this now with the LORD God who is “above all gods” (5). He takes Israel for his treasured possession, which means he sees and acts. He creates the seas and brings the storms. He frees his people, destroys their enemies, even the greatest known to men—the giants, he gives his people the promised land. What do the gods do? Nothing. By comparison, they can’t even move. In fact, they are worse than the idols they are said to inhabit, for at least an idol has eyes (unless it is in a museum and has no head). What other god has done the things as our God? This is what the song is singing.

What an important thing to talk about in our day, a day full of idols and spirituality, and a growing revival of paganism. It is becoming the “cool” thing in the West to

revisit the ancient gods of old. But when did they create the universe? When did they choose and free a people? When did they ever give anyone a promised land by defeating the evil people who dwelt therein? The answer is, never. But this is the claim of the Bible for 1,200+ years or writing by over 40 authors in three different languages spread out over three continents, and testified by his people for over 4,000 years of this kind of redemptive activity. No, ignoring the reality of the gods is not helpful. Understanding their rightful place and their impotence compared to the one who created even them, this is powerful and makes God worthy of much praise. God is totally mighty over them. He is the Most High.

False Worship Chisel (18)

But this point is driven home in the next verse in a stunning claim about false worship. You see, in worship, you become the thing you worship. And make no mistake, everyone worships something. Thus it says, “**Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them**” (18). What do they become like? Mute, blind, deaf, lifeless, unbreathing creatures. They basically become the evil of horror movies.

Picturing this in our **mosaic** we might make some kind of **hewn stone** in the background, man-made false worship of the kind that you find immediately after the Ten Commandments. The stone represent the idols (the gods). Cutting it represents our attempt to worship them and thus become like them.

True Worship Stone (19-21)

On the other than, the last three verses give us true worship. It is the people of God coming to bless him in the place where he has chosen to dwell. “O house of Israel, bless the LORD! O house of Aaron, bless the LORD! O house of Levi, bless the LORD! You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD” (19-20). As it does earlier in Book III, it takes the main parts of the people of God, the tribes, the priests, and combines them with those who fear God in order to show that one must approach this God by faith. When they do, they bless them in the place he has chosen to dwell.

Blessed be the LORD from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem (21). He is the “**he who dwells in Jerusalem?**” Here it is Yahweh. But we can be more specific. God commanded them, “**You shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make**

his habitation there. There you shall go” (Deut 12:5). Here we have reference to the Name and the place is the same as here: Jerusalem. Here, I would create the ark of the covenant with some kind of shadowy figure on top of the Ark, which is the throne of the Angel who is the Name of the LORD. It would be in the temple, in the holy city, in the place where he alone has chosen to dwell. And it would depict the people’s coming from all over, up from the valleys and lowlands to the mountain where God dwells.

Interestingly, the Targum here that he “*has who has made his Shekinah dwell in Jerusalem.*” Every single time the Jews would have been tempted to disembody the word “God” in some way, so as to think of the bare essence, the Targums carefully add buffer words like *Shekinah* (the Glory) or *Memra* (Word) or *Name* in order to help them see that God can only come to us through a mediator who is somehow both God and not God.

The Shekinah can be considered either the Second or the Third Person of the Trinity. Calvin sees the Spirit throughout saying, “*The Holy Spirit declares that he does whatsoever pleases him.*” This is certainly not wrong. For the Shekinah cloud is the sign of God’s presence with his people, and that cloud is an image of the Spirit.

However, the central feature, which also happens to be the first feature of this song and whom we have seen throughout the song is the Name. The center verse, “**Your Name, O LORD, endures forever**” (13). And the first verse, “Praise the **Name** of the LORD ... Sing to his **Name**, for it is pleasant.”

Song writers seem to know this implicitly. “What a beautiful Name it is. What a beautiful Name it is. The Name of Jesus Christ my King. What a beautiful Name it is.”⁸ “Precious Name, oh, how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of Heav’n.”⁹ “How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.”¹⁰

In our own hymnal, the word “Name” appears in the first seven songs, 8 of the first 10, 11 of the first 15, and 14 of the first 20. As someone writes, there’s just “**Something about the Name of Jesus,**”¹¹ and someone else sings, “**Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there’s just something about that name.**”¹²

⁸ Ben Fielding, Brooke Ligertwood, “What a Beautiful Name,” Hillsong. The song begins, “You were the Word at the beginning” (see our comments below).

⁹ Lydia O. “Baxter, Precious Name,” 1870.

¹⁰ John Newton, “How sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds,” 1774.

¹¹ Kirk Franklin, “Something About the Name of Jesus.”

¹² Bill Gather, “There’s Something About that Name.”

But whereas almost all of these songs take their cue from something like Philippians 2, **what most don't realize is that this is deeply OT theology.** The Targum reads, **“O LORD, you Name endures forever ... For the Memra (the Word) of the LORD will judge the cause of his people.”** One of the above mentioned songs begins, **“You were the Word at the beginning.”** Indeed, and what is that “something” about this name? Not that it is a magic word, a talisman, a charm whereby speaking it makes good things happen. But rather, the Word is God. The Name is the God of Ps 135.

And he has come in human flesh and we have seen his glory, the Glory as of the only begotten God full of grace and truth. He is the reason why we gather, why we praise, and because he has sent his Spirit to us, we may all do this with one voice and one accord.

In Revelation he is depicted as the Lamb, and that is the last few stones of our Mosaic. The Lamb of God dead for sinners, alive for his people. The perfect embodiment of humanity. The perfect image of God. Therefore, trust in this Jesus of Psalm 135, a song that takes almost all of its language from all the other parts of the OT and know then that this Jesus has always been the object of his people's praise.

Therefore, God's people, praise the LORD. Hallelujah.
Praise the LORD.