

Psalm 115: Their idols are silver and gold



## Psalm 115 (113 Part 2) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

Because the Greek Septuagint (and consequently the Latin Vulgate and the Christian liturgical texts) kept the Hebrew Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 together as a single psalm, the numbering of the Greek, Latin and liturgical psalms up to this point has been one behind the Hebrew numbering. This would lead one to expect Hebrew Psalm 115 to be Psalm 114 in the Greek Bible.

However Hebrew Psalm 114 does not end with the cry ‘Praise YH! [Hal<sup>e</sup>lu Yah]’, like Psalm 113 and Psalm 115. It is perhaps for this reason that the Septuagint has Psalm 115 as continuation of Psalm 114, numbering it Psalm 113 and counting the verses from verse 9.

It is a polemic against idols from the period of the Exile. Before the Exile there was an attempt to educate the people away from having idols, because of the danger of falling back into an identification of Yahweh with an idol (see the account of the golden calf, Exodus 32, and the idols in Bethel, 1Kings 12:29).

During the exile, they had to face the impression that Marduk, the god of Babyon, had defeated Yahweh, Israel's God. Furthermore they could only point to a destroyed sanctuary when asked: 'Where is your god?' Their response was 'Our God is in heaven. He is the creator of heaven and earth' (see Genesis 1).

This psalm belongs with parts of Second Isaiah in mocking the popular Babylonian idol-worship.

## Isaiah 44:12-20

‘The iron smith fashions it and works it over the coals, shaping it with hammers, and forging it ... He makes it in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine ... The carpenter makes a god and worships it, makes it a carved image and bows down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he roasts meat, eats it and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire!’ The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bows down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, ‘Save me, for you are my god!’

## Isaiah 44:12-20

‘They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say: “Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?”’

## Isaiah 46:1-7

‘Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary animals ... Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales-- they hire a goldsmith, who makes it into a god.

## Isaiah 46:1-7

‘Then they fall down and worship! They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries out to it, it does not answer or save anyone.’

As we pray this psalm we must recognise that there is a continuing danger of worshipping the works of our hands!

‘Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them’(Psalm 62:10).



Not to us, Lord, not to us,  
but to your name give glory,  
because of your love,  
because of your faithfulness.

The psalmist acknowledges that even the community is incapable of giving glory to God. He implores God to glorify himself by revealing his kindness and faithfulness by acting in history.

‘I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh’(Exodus 14:4).

‘Before all the people I will be glorified’(Leviticus 10:3).

‘I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory in your midst. They shall know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments in it, and manifest my holiness in it’(Ezekiel 28:22).

‘On the day that I show my glory’(Ezekiel 39:13).

## Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'

The people of Judah are being mocked because the temple has been destroyed, thus 'proving' that YHWH is of no consequence.

'My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God?''(Psalm 42:3).

'Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?''(Psalm 79:10).

Our God is in the heavens and answers to no one.

This is the psalmist's response:

'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfil my intention'(Isaiah 46:10).

Their gods are crafted by hand,  
mere silver and gold.

They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.

They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.

They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk.

No sound comes forth  
from their hollow throats.

Those who make them are like them;  
as are all who trust in them.

These verses are found also in Psalm 135:15-18

‘Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves’(Jeremiah 2:5).

‘They shall be turned back and utterly put to shame – those who trust in carved images, who say to cast images, ‘You are our gods’(Isaiah 42:17).

Israel, trust in the Lord,  
your strength and your shield.

House of Aaron, trust in the Lord,  
your strength and your shield.

All who revere the Lord, trust in the Lord,  
your strength and your shield.

Always mindful of us, the Lord will bless us all:  
the house of Israel; the house of Aaron;  
all who revere the Lord,  
both small and great.

May the Lord bless you more and more,  
you and your children.

May you be truly blessed  
by the Maker of heaven and earth.

‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father’(Matthew 25:34).

The heavens belong to the Lord,  
who has entrusted the earth to you.

The dead go down into silence.

They do not praise the Lord.

But we, the living, bless the Lord,  
now and for ever. Amen!



‘O Lord, look down from your holy dwelling, and consider us. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see. For the dead who are in Hades, whose spirit has been taken from their bodies, will not ascribe glory or justice to the Lord. But the person who is deeply grieved, who walks bowed and feeble, with failing eyes and famished soul, will declare your glory and righteousness, O Lord’(Baruch 2:16-18).