

תהלת ה' ידבר פי (III) HALLEL

עיון במזמור קט"ו - Analysis of Psalm 115

by Yitzchak Etshalom

I

INTRODUCTION (PART 3)

We have reached the mid-point of our series on the 6 psalms that make up the Hallel. Regarding that selfsame Hallel, the Gemara states:

R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Shim'on b. Yehozadak: There are eighteen days on which an individual completes the Hallel: the eight days of the Feast [of Sukkot], the eight days of Hanukkah, the first Festival day of Passover and the Festival day of the Feast of Weeks. In the exile - on twenty-one days: the nine days of the Feast [of Sukkot], the eight days of Hanukkah, the two Festival days of Passover, and the two Festival days of the Feast of Weeks. (BT Arakhin 10a)

With the exception of Hanukkah (and, the special Hallel recited as part of the Seder), the motivating factor for this recitation is Simchah; i.e. as part of our rejoicing on the holiday, we sing songs of praise to G-d. (this is Ramban's take on the Mitzvah, which he maintains is Toraic in source). As to the reason for the distinction between Sukkot - which "earns" Hallel on each day - and Pesach - when Hallel is recited only on the first day - the Gemara explains that since the additional offerings of the day (מוספי היום) on Sukkot varied from day to day, each day has its own significance. Rabbi Soloveitchik ז"ל would say that each day of Sukkot has its own קדושת היום, as manifested by the unique Korban offered. Pesach, contradistinctively, has an identical Musaf each day. (This may also explain the odd difference between the signatures of the final Berakhah after the Haftarah on שבת המועד - on Sukkot, we mention the festival, but not on Pesach).

The Hallel on Hanukkah is clearly not related to Simchah; it is either tied to the original "second Sukkot" ordinance of Hanukkah (see *V'shinantam* 5:10) or, as the Gemara (Arakhin 10b) states, in thanksgiving for the miracle.

Every shul-goer, however, looks at the list of Hallel-dates and immediately notices a glaring omission - where is ראש חודש? (He or she will also wonder what happened to the rest of Pesach - "everyone knows" that we say Hallel throughout the festival.).

The answer can be found in this vignette involving the great Amora, Rav, who left his home in Babylonia as a young man to study at the feet of R. Yehudah haNassi. When that great patriarch passed on, Rav returned to Bavel and established the great Yeshivah at Sura, an institution of Torah study that endured for roughly a thousand years (in spite of its move to Baghdad, in the 7th century, under the Caliphate). Upon his return to Bavel, he found an interesting custom (evidently, he was visiting a town for the first time). The Gemara (Ta'anit 28a) relates:

Rav came to Babylonia and he noticed that they recited the Hallel on New Moon; at first he thought of stopping them but when he saw that they omitted parts of it he remarked: It is clearly evident that it is an old ancestral custom with them.

Hence, the practice - which, not long after, spread in popularity and gained universal acceptance - of reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh (and on the remaining days of Pesach), is a מנהג and not a מצוה. (This is the source of much debate among the Rishonim as to whether a Berakhah should preface its recitation - see MT Hanukkah 3:7-8 and RABD ad loc., MT Berakhhot 11:16 and RABD ad loc., Tosafot Berakhhot 14a s.v. Yamim)

As noted, however, the custom could only be justified because it differed from "proper Hallel" and, therefore, did not represent an attempt to usurp the dictates of the calendar ordinance regarding which days "merit" Hallel-recitation. The Gemara does not tell us which sections in these six psalms were skipped; indeed, the focus of Rav's comfort was not so much as which texts were skipped as much as noting that some texts were omitted. Rambam's wording of the Halakhah (Hanukkah *ibid.*) implies that the main concern is that some text be elided, such that a complete Hallel is not recited. Nonetheless, the conventional custom is nearly identical to that recorded by Rambam (*ibid.*) and two passages are skipped. The first is the first eleven verses of our psalm (115); the

second is the first eleven verses of psalm 116.

As a result of this, each of these psalms is written as two separate paragraphs in Siddurim, giving us an immediate sense of “two sections”. This should make our job of identifying the stanzas in each psalm that much easier - but it may make it more difficult to see beyond these divisions. We will find, in any case, that in order to gain a fuller appreciation of the psalm we will have to analyze its structure on a more intricate level. This will allow us to “dig deeper” into the meaning of this section of Hallel.

II

MIZMOR 115: THE TEXT

לא לנו ה' לא לנו כי לשמך תן כבוד על חסדך על אמתך
למה יאמרו הגוים איה נא אלקיהם
ואלהינו בשמים כל אשר חפץ עשה
עצביהם כסף וזהב מעשה ידיאדם
פה להם ולא ידברו עינים להם ולא יראו
אזנים להם ולא ישמעו אף להם ולא יריחון
ידיהם ולא ימישון רגליהם ולא יהלכו לא יהגו בגרונם
כמוהם יהיו עשיהם כל אשר בטח בהם
ישראל בטח בה' עזרם ומגנם הוא
בית אהרן בטחו בה' עזרם ומגנם הוא
יראי ה' בטחו בה' עזרם ומגנם הוא
ה' זכרנו יברך יברך את בית ישראל יברך את בית אהרן
יברך יראי ה' הקטנים עם הגדלים
יסף ה' עליכם עליכם ועל בניכם
ברוכים אתם לה' עשה שמים וארץ
השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם
לא המתים יהללו קה ולא כל ירדי דומה
ואנחנו נברך קה מעתה ועד עולם הללויה

- 1) Not to us, Hashem, not to us, but to Your name give glory, for Your loving kindness, and for Your truth's sake.
- 2) Why should the nations say, Where, pray tell, is their G-d?
- 3) But our G-d is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
- 4) Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
- 5) They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they can not see;
- 6) They have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they can not smell;
- 7) They have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they can not walk; and through their throat they cannot speak.
- 8) May they who make them become like them, and every one who trusts in them!
- 9) O Yisra'el, trust in Hashem; He is their help and their shield.
- 10) O house of Aharon, trust in Hashem; He is their help and their shield.
- 11) You who fear Hashem, trust in Hashem; He is their help and their shield.
- 12) Hashem has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Yisra'el; he will bless the house of Aharon.
- 13) He will bless those who fear Hashem, both small and great.
- 14) May Hashem increase you more and more, you and your children.
- 15) May you be blessed of Hashem Who made heaven and earth.
- 16) The heavens are the heavens of Hashem; but He has given the earth to the children of men.
- 17) The dead cannot praise Hashem (יִיָּהּ), nor can any who go down into silence.
- 18) But we will bless Hashem (יִיָּהּ) from this time forth and for evermore. Hallelujah!

As promised in last week's shiur, we will analyze this psalm "top-down", first dividing it into its basic sections, then identifying sub-themes and stanzas, after which we will attend to difficult words and ideas in the text. This will, of course, only serve as the (necessary) foundation that will allow us to investigate the role of this psalm within the corpus of הלל מצרים.

III STRUCTURE OF THE PSALM

Although we intuitively break this Psalm into the two sections marked off by liturgical practice, we ought to re-evaluate this division:

A: 1-11

B: 12-18

What marks these two off as separate halves of the psalm? In order to answer this question, we would have to find a theme, a recurring phrase or leitwort that is prevalent in one half and absent from the other. One other possibility is if we can note some structural nuance that marks v. 11 as an "end-point" or identifies v. 12 as a "beginning point."

To clarify this last point, we need only look at the division of the psalms into the chapter divisions with which we are familiar. How do we know, for instance, where psalm 113 begins and ends? (Which also helps us identify where ps. 112 ends and where ps. 114 begins). The "cue-word" "Halleluyah" at the beginning and end of the psalm is an example of a "psalm-marker". We know that a new psalm begins when we see a word like that; we also know that the psalm ends when "Halleluyah" appears. (How we know that: Many psalms which have "signature" words/phrases, followed by psalms which begin with clear "opening" words/phrases, such as superscriptions that assign authorship or dedication to a particular person or group).

An analysis of the structure of the text does provide a solid basis for this division, as follows:

Unlike most of the verses in this psalm (and throughout the Hallel – indeed, in the entire corpus of T'hillim), the first verse has three phrases:

א: לא לנו ה' לא לנו
ב: כי לשמך תן כבוד
ג: על חסדך על אמתך

Since nearly all the rest of the verses of this psalm are bicola (i.e. verses of two phrases), this tricolon stands out and commands our attention. Both in the way that it would be sung in the Mikdash (often sung antiphonally – call and response between two groups of Levi'im) and the way it would be graphically represented, the first phrase serves as some sort of general header. To wit, we would represent the verse as follows:

לא לנו ה' לא לנו
כי לשמך תן כבוד
על חסדך על אמתך

After which, the rest of the psalm would "fall into place", the first half of each verse in the first column, the second hemistich in the other column.

That helps us mark off verse 1 as a "new beginning" (which is helpful, since in many T'nakhim, there is no Parashah break after ps. 114!). Properly understanding the role of the tricolon here will help us to further break the psalm into its composite parts.

With the exception of v. 7 – which has its own reasons for its length – the only other tricolon is verse 12:

ה' זכרנו יברך יברך את בית ישראל יברך את בית אהרן

Or, as we would prefer to display it:

ה' זכרנו יברך
יברך את בית ישראל
יברך את בית אהרן

As this can be seen as another form of "general header", it gives support for the traditional division of this psalm after v. 11. We must now reevaluate the text, based on this division, and attempt to define the themes of each half.

In evaluating the thematic elements of the first verses in our psalm, it would seem that a polemic against idolatry is the focus of the first half. That polemic, however, ends at v. 8, after which the psalmist turns to exhort his audience (more on this tripartite assemblage later) to trust in G-d. The next few verses are all tied to blessing – blessing that same assemblage (by its identifiable groups) and declaring a commitment to bless G-d in perpetuity.

On the basis of content, then, one could easily argue for a basic breakdown of the psalm after v.8, leaving us with 10 verses in the second half. Since we have shown, on the basis of textual structure, however, that we must include vv. 9-11 in this section, we'll need to expand that definition somewhat. We can only do that once we've examined each verse in depth.

IV THE FIRST HALF: vv. 1-11

v1: לא לנו

a) The opening phrase לא לנו is a bit enigmatic, as we don't yet have an idea what the psalmist is requesting. Even after seeing the entire verse, in which the author is apparently asking for some manifestation of G-d's glory, we aren't quite sure what the request entails. The second verse will get us closer to a clear understanding. This opening - לא לנו, is presented as an *anaphora*, i.e. the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a series of clauses or sentences. This poetic device is quite common in T"hillim (see, especially, the anaphora in psalm 29: ה' קול ה'... קול ה'... קול ה'... etc.), serving both poetic and oratorical functions. Poetically, it enhances and sets the meter; rhetorically it emphasizes a theme. Just as the above-noted ps. 29 is informed by the idea of "giving unto G-d" by הבו and describing the appearance of G-d in this world by the oft-repeated קול ה', similarly our psalm is defined, at its outset, by a declaration that our request is "not for our own benefit".

b) That tricky word, כי, which has many meanings, must here be translated as "rather", as it would anytime it follows a negative. (see, *inter alia*, Zekharyah 4:6).

c) The word "truth" here is difficult. It is clear how an appeal to G-d's kindness is appropriate -although that mention in this context must also be clarified. In reality, the translation presented above "and for Your truth's sake", is inexact. The phrase על אמתך is an example of a *hendiadys*, (from Greek *hen*, "one" *dia*, "through" *dis*, "two") the expression of a single idea by two nouns instead of a noun and its qualifier. In order to express the idea of *the truth of Your kindness* by על אמתת חסדך, the common style in Biblical poetry is to turn the qualifier (אמתת) into a separate noun; hence על חסדך על אמתך. This explains the missing conjunctive (ו) before the last על. A better translation would be *for the truth of Your kindness*. What does this phrase mean? We will be better prepared to answer that once we look at v. 2

v. 2:

למה יאמרו...הלל מצרים is a familiar phrase with powerful associations. It is this allusion that will help us not only discover the request of v. 1 but will also explain the inclusion of this psalm in הלל מצרים.

In the immediate aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, as Mosheh was still atop Sinai, G-d expressed His wrath with the people:

Now therefore let Me alone, that My anger may burn hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of you a great nation. And Mosheh pleaded with Hashem his G-d, and said, Hashem, why does Your anger burn hot against your people, whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? למה יאמרו מצרים (Why should the Egyptians speak,) and say, For an evil intent did He brought them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce anger, and repent of this evil against Your people. Remember Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yisra'el, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give to your seed, and they shall inherit it forever. And Hashem repented of the evil that He thought to do to His people. (Sh'mot 32:10-14)

This is one of the four occurrences in T'nakh of the phrase למה יאמרו - and the other three (Yoel 2:17, ps. 79:10, 115:2) seem to be based on this one. Mosheh is pleading with Hashem not to destroy His nation and, unable to appeal to Divine Justice (since the people have egregiously violated the covenant), he directs his prayer at the impact of such an act of destruction on G-d's Name (=reputation) in the world. What will the Egyptians say?

As R. Avraham ibn Ezra notes (Sh'mot 32:12):

As our forebears hinted, that they left Mitzrayim under an ominous star. Behold, they will say that Hashem is unable to overpower this star to spare those who cleave to Him. And when He saw that He was impotent in the face of this star, He slaughtered them. And this will be an awful desecration of the Name.

In other words, Mosheh appeals to G-d to spare His people in order to maintain the proper understanding of His truth among the nations.

We now understand the nature of the request in our psalm. The psalmist finds himself, representing the nation, in straits that lead the surrounding peoples to claim that G-d has abandoned His people, giving lie to the oath of protection given to us at Sinai. This is born out by the second half of the verse: **איה נא אלקיהם**. The word **נא** is rendered by some as "please", as they have it throughout T'nakh. R. Avraham ibn Ezra, however, maintains that the word always means "now" (with the notable exception of Sh'mot 12:10 - see his comments at T'hilim 80:15). The nations say *where now is their G-d* - i.e. they admit to Israelite selection at an earlier time, but maintain that our G-d has rejected us, as reflected by our current sorry state.

The psalmist is appealing to G-d to save the people so that the reputation of his true/loyal/eternal kindness (**אמתת חסיד**) will be maintained. He borrows Mosheh's words so as to create a sense of identification of the present crisis with the Exodus.

v. 3: **ואלקינו בשמים...**

Most commentators suggest that this verse is our response - in which case the **ואי** is a disjunctive, best translated as "rather" or "but", rejecting the prior assertion. To wit - you are wrong about our G-d, Whose abode is in the heavens and does as He sees fit. Our present crisis is not the result of abandonment as much as part of His design for us.

This rendition is difficult on two counts. Thematically, it offers no solution to the problem posed in v. 2 (they will still claim that we've been abandoned by G-d). Contextually, it interrupts our assessment of the pagan world - v. 2 represents what they are saying and vv.4-8 are our evaluation of their worship. V. 3, if understood to be our statement of what we know to be the truth, does not belong here.

I would like to suggest a different take on v. 3 that avoids both of these problems and is contextually sound. If we were to punctuate the first 3 verses, we would begin a quote at the middle of v. 2 before the word **איה**...and close that quote at the end of v. 2. I'd like to suggest that we extend the quote through v. 3. Reading the beginning of v. 3 as an antithetical **ואי**, the nations will claim that not only has our G-d abandoned us, but He has been overpowered by their gods who, from heaven, do as they please. In response, we use the same antithetical **ואי** six times as part of the direct and sharp polemic against the "cult of the well-formed idols".

v. 4:

עצבתם comes from the root **עצב** (= form); i.e. the things they have formed. There is a double-entendre here, as noted by ibn Ezra. These idols bring nothing but sadness (**עצבות**) to their devotees (compare with Rashi at Sh'mot 20:3). The irony of worshipping something made by the adherent is overtly presented here; there is a more subtle irony that emerges from a careful reading of the next few verses. The ostensible target of the ridicule here is the idol-maker. It is only at the conclusion of the polemic that the net of our sarcasm is spread to include all followers of these vanities.

vv. 5-7:

In these three verses, the psalmist identifies seven areas of human action that, in spite of having the appropriate image, the idols are incapable of performing. The literary form of describing a complete cycle by using seven members (well-documented throughout T'nakh) causes the psalmist to make one verse a tricolon, sacrificing metrical balance for symbolic wholeness. The first two of these verses follow a common style, affirming the primary four disabilities of the idols as documented in ps. 135:16-17 (two of them, sight and hearing, also appear in polemics against the nation [!] in Yirmiyah 5:21 and Yehezq'e'l 12:2). It seems clear that the psalmist is concerned with scoring a complete polemic against the vanity of pagan belief here, not only listing seven actions that the idols cannot perform, but also forming an inclusio by beginning and ending with their essential inability to speak.

Note that in v. 7, the form of the words change - instead of **ידיים להם**, it becomes **ידיהם**: this is a change born of concern for meter. Note also that the final phrase uses the verb **הגה** to denote speech. In spite of the rabbinic use of this word as "thinking" or "reason" (modern Heb. **הגיון** = logic), in T'nakh it means "speech". Parenthetically, this leads us to reexamine the meaning of the last verse of ps. 19, which we say at the end of every T'fillah - **יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי...**; the latter phrase is usually translated *meditations of my heart*; however, the root for **הגיון** means speech, such that a proper translation gives us: *"May the words of my mouth and the speech of my לב..."*. In turn, we understand that **לב** may mean "throat", in addition to its various other meanings (see Ramban, ibn Ezra at D'varim 6:5). One further note: The change in style in the last item may be due to the fact that Canaanite idols generally had no necks; the head was placed directly on a torso.

v. 8: כמורם

The polemic ends with a curse placed on the makers of these idols; it is a curious curse, since it approximates our own value system. Chief among our ambitions is *imitatio dei*, to imitate the Divine, as it were. Jewish ethics is informed by the exhortation "to be similar to the Creator"; i.e. just as He is forgiving, etc. We then turn this notion around and wish the same to the idolaters - may they, too, end up as the gods they worship. The final sting, in the second colon, spreads the "goodwill" beyond the idol-makers to all of those who trust in them.

Since v. 8 clearly marks the end of one sub-theme in this first half, it is prudent to note a subtler charge within the polemic than that readily visible. The overt ridicule is aimed at the "sightless, voiceless" etc. idols, whose "full-formed" images are a sham. Reading the text, however, we wonder why these six activities were singled out for ridicule; especially in light of the "shorter version" in ps. 135. If the psalmist desired a complete number of seven, since he was willing to "double up" on speech, he could have done the same with the other "essential" disabilities - why add the "hands" and "feet"?

All six of these activities are ascribed to G-d:

- 1) Speech: *With him I speak mouth to mouth* (Bamidbar 12:8)
- 2) Sight: *And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great..* (B'reshet 6:5)
- 3) Hearing: *And Hashem listened to the voice of Yisra'el* (Bamidbar 21:3)
- 4) Smell: *And Hashem smelled the pleasing odor...* (B'reshet 8:21)
- 5) Feel: *And Hashem G-d formed man of the dust of the ground* (ibid. 2:7)
- 6) Walking: *They heard the voice of Hashem G-d walking in the garden..* (ibid. 3:8).

The upshot of this polemic is: Your idols have the images of sight etc., but they accomplish none of them. Our G-d has no image, yet He does every one of them.

vv. 9-11: ישראל

Three groups are addressed in these verses; this same tripartite division of the assemblage will appear twice more in the Hallel. Most Rishonim understand **יראי ה'** (G-d-fearers) to be either converts (who might not be included in the specific Yisra'el, which also excludes Kohanim) or "righteous gentiles" who have eschewed idolatry and embraced the Noahide code. The fact that the assemblage is not addressed as one may persuade us to place the psalm squarely in the province of the Mikdash - a notion we will reassess in the final installment.

Each group is adjured to place their trust in Hashem (since) or (as a result or which) He is the source of their salvation. Either way that we read the exhortation, it stands as a subtle condemnation of any member of these groups who would be foolish enough to

put his trust in the above-mentioned idols.

SUMMARY OF PART I

The first part is made up of three stanzas:

- 1) vv. 1-3: Prayer to G-d regarding the nations' "boast"
- 2) vv. 4-8: polemic against idolatry
- 3) vv. 9-11: exhortation to trust in G-d.

We might title the entire section: ***Against Idolatry***

V

THE SECOND HALF: vv. 12-18

vv. 12-13: ה' זכרנו

The commentators rejected, out of hand, ibn Giqatilah's contention that זכרנו refers to "the males"; it is, rather, associated with the word זכר. This might be read as: *Hashem, Who has remembered us, will bless...* As noted above, this verse is a tricolon, setting it off as the beginning of a section. The opening colon sets the tone for the entire section. As opposed to the first half, where the plea is "not for our sake" (focusing on the glory of G-d, in Whom we ought place our trust), this half is oriented towards propagating G-d's blessings on the assemblage.

The continuation of the first verse mentions two of the three groups earlier exhorted ([Beit] Yisra'el, Beit Aharon), finishing the "mirror" effect in the next verse. The same people who were exhorted to place their trust in G-d have evidently done so and are worthy of G-d's blessing.

The final phrase: עם הגדולים הקטינים is a *merismus*, where a whole is divided into its parts. Here, the psalmist prays that G-d should bless everyone; he expresses this by selecting the polar opposites (insignificant and great) to intend "everyone".

vv. 14-16: יוסף ה'

The psalmist explicates his blessing; that those assembled should all be blessed with fertility into the third generation. There is an allusion here to Yoseph, who raised his great-grandchildren on his knees (B'resheet 50:23). Just as the hint to Mosheh's prayer in v. 2, this serves to place the feel of the psalm squarely in the Egypt narrative.

The "mirroring" of the first half in this section continues, as G-d is described not only as "residing" in the heavens (as opposed to the supposition of the nations in v. 3), but as the One Who fashioned both heavens and earth.

We would normally expect v. 15 to be the end of the stanza, with its focus on ברכה, but v. 16 is clearly an extension of its antecedent. He Who formed the heavens and earth (v. 15) apportioned each - the heavens to Himself and the earth to Man. This also serves to explain why the crisis experienced in the first half is no crisis at all. Man has dominion over earth, as granted by G-d (B'resheet 1:28-30) - and we have no dominion over the events taking place "in heaven" - i.e. beyond our grasp. Yisra'el's success or failure is not a reflection of Divine "victory"; it signifies nothing about His supremacy, rather about the nature of our relationship at that point.

vv. 17-18

The sudden appearance here of the Name ייה, which we have not yet seen (except as part of "Halleluyah" in ch. 113) in the Hallel (but will encounter again in ch. 118) indicates a new stanza. The blessings bestowed until now are accepted with this response - the dead do not praise Hashem. Perhaps this is a further polemic against paganism, this time against the cult of the dead. (if that is the case, this adds to the subtle connection to Egypt). Curiously, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Sukkah 3:1) sees this verse as the source of the Halakhah that a withered Lulav is invalid - understanding that "the dead" cannot be an instrument for praise to the living G-d.

How is this response appropriate to the blessing just bestowed?

The declaration that the dead cannot praise G-d leaves the worshipper with a certain sense of futility - I can praise today, but my time will come and I will be silenced. Hence, the blessing of fertility and multiple generations is greeted not by excitement of the amassing of multi-generational fortunes or power, but rather by the greatest satisfaction of all:

ואנחנו נברך ייָה מעתה ועד עולם...

(the ויאִי is antithetical - the dead do not praise You, but we will)

How can anyone commit to praising G-d forever if “the dead cannot praise”? Simply - through the vehicle of Anachnu; the individual passes on but the community lives forever. The promise of progeny yields this commitment.

SUMMARY OF PART II

The second half is made up of two stanzas:

- 1) vv. 12-16 - B'rakhah
- 2) vv. 17-18 - Response

This half should be titled: ***Blessing and Praise***

VI

POSTSCRIPT: THE ROLE OF PSALM 115 WITHIN HALLEL

As we mentioned in the second installment, ch. 114 seems to interrupt the flow of content. In ch. 113, we praise G-d Who is high in His heavens and cares for His creatures below - not dissimilar from the theme of this psalm.

The critical difference between 113 and 115 explains the “interjection” of ps. 114. Ch. 113 is universal; any creature could reasonably sing this praise. Ch. 115, on the other hand, places the true belief in the G-d of Israel against the pagan cult of the “well-formed idols” (and, perhaps, against the Egyptian cult of the dead). This is only possible once the dramatic and historic selection of Israel is part of the equation.

Until this point, in our praise for G-d known as הלל מצרים, we have praised G-d, sung of the earth-shattering appearance of G-d at the Exodus and highlighted the unique and unwavering nature of our commitment to G-d.

We have not yet accomplished what is needed to complete our praise - but we have three more psalms that will help us realize this joyful goal.