

Psalm 136

Psalm 136:

This psalm is a hymn of praise like the preceding: a call to praise (verses 1-3), a cause for praise (verses 4-25), and a conclusion (verse 26).

However, this psalm is absolutely unique because its refrain is repeated at the end of each verse: “for his mercy endureth for ever”.

The psalm was no doubt sung antiphonally with the people responding with the refrain.

The word mercy is important in the Psalter.

It refers to God’s loyal love for His people: He is in covenant with them, and He loves to be loyal to that covenant.

Verses 1-26:

This psalm, extremely similar to Psalm 135, closes the Great Hallel.

Unique to all the psalms, Psalm 136 uses the antiphonal refrain “For His loving-kindness is everlasting” after each stanza, perhaps spoken by the people in responsive worship.

The author and occasion remain unknown.

- I. Call to Praise (136:1-3).
- II. Causes for Praise (136:4-22);
 - A. God’s Creation (136:4-9);
 - B. God’s Deliverance (136:10-15);
 - C. God’s Care and Gift (136:16-22);
- III. Concluding Praise (136:23-26).

Verses 1-26:

This psalm has a unique construction, repeating at the close of each verse:

“for His mercy endureth forever”.

This refrain may have been used in several ways, either in public worship, in a response by a choir or by the congregation.

All that God does, whether it seems to be a display of power or justice, severity or wrath, is actually a display of His “mercy”.

His loyal love provides a foundation for praise.

Psalm 136:1 "O give thanks unto the LORD; for [he is] good: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

In himself, and to all his creatures; and especially to his chosen people.

Who therefore should give thanks to him daily in the name of Christ.

For all blessings temporal and spiritual, in faith and fervency, and in the sincerity of their souls, with their whole heart.

“He is good” (see note on Psalm 135:3).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

It is the same with his love, which is from everlasting to everlasting.

And continues notwithstanding the sins of his people.

The hidings of his face from them, and his chastisements of them.

The covenant which is founded on mercy, and all the blessings of it, which are the sure mercies of David, last forever.

And hence the vessels of mercy shall certainly be saved, and not lost (see Psalm 106:1).

The psalmist is not just praising the LORD himself, but encourages others to praise Him as well.

There is only one good, and that is God.

He is not just good; He is goodness in its entirety.

His mercy is like He is, it is everlasting.

Psalm 136:2 "O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Not only of the gods of the Gentiles, who are by name and not by nature gods.

Or of civil magistrates, who are so called, and seem to be designed in the next verse.

But the angels, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi. Christ, our Immanuel, is the God of them, the object of their worship and adoration, being their Creator and Preserver (Psalm 97:7).

So the Heathens say of the Maker of all things, him you may properly call the God of gods, the Supreme and Best.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

In the preservation of those excellent creatures from apostasy, when many of their species fell.

And in the continuance and confirmation of them in the state in which they were created.

And in making use of them as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

And as a guard about them while they live, and at death to convey their souls to heaven.

He is the Creator of all these things that people have for little gods in this earth.

We have already gone into the fact that He has proved, over and over, His superiority to all gods.

Psalm 136:3 "O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Which is not only the title of the God of Israel, as the former (Deut. 10:17); but of the Messiah (Rev. 19:16).

Who is the Prince of the kings of the earth.

Under whom they are, and by whom they reign, and to whom they are accountable, being higher than they.

As nature, so by office (Rev. 1:5; Psalm 89:27).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

In putting it into the hearts of both kings and princes, which he has in his hands, to show favor to his people.

Even to be their nursing fathers.

And in curbing the power, restraining the wrath, of oppressors; and protecting his people from their rage and violence.

The One we have known as our Savior will return to the earth, and He will be Lord of lords.

The little letter lords will be those who will rule with Him as his subordinates.

Psalm 136:4 "To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

As in the works of creation at first, having no help from angels or men.

So in the works of providence, many of which are unsearchable, and past finding out, and in which he has no assistance from creatures.

And in the works of grace, redemption, and salvation, which his own arm has wrought out; as well as what he did when here on earth in our nature.

The miracles then wrought by his omnipotent arm alone.

And even all the wonders which Moses and Elijah did under the Old Testament, and the apostles of Christ under the New, were done.

Not by their power, but by his alone.

Who will do still greater wonders, when he shall create all tidings new, raise the dead, and summon all nations before him, and render to everyone according to his works.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Towards his people, for whose sake all these wonders are wrought.

We know that the miracles that Jesus did were so many, that there would not be enough books in all the world to contain them, if they were all written down.

Psalm 136:5 "To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

In such a curious manner, in such a proper and delightful situation, with such effects, and for such uses (Prov. 3:19).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Which appears in the continued influences of the heaven; the dew, rain, and snow, that descend from it on the earth to water and make it fruitful.

And to produce those rich and valuable blessings called the "precious things of heaven" (Deuteronomy. 33:13).

And which are of the utmost importance for the service of man and beast.

And, besides, God has of his infinite mercy, which continues, provided an inheritance in the heavens, a house eternal in the heavens, mansions of bliss and glory there.

Which Christ is now preparing for his saints, that they may dwell with him in them for evermore.

This we have spoken of so many times.

The powers in the world that are really powers, are the spoken and the written Word.

The spoken Word brought the heavens into existence.

Psalm 136:6 "To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Or, "besides the waters", close by them, and yet secures the earth from being covered with them (see Psalm 24:2).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

It was in mercy he caused the waters to go off the earth which first covered it.

That trees, plants, and herbs, might spring up out of it, and that it might be a very fit habitation for man.

And though for the sins of the old world these waters were let in upon it.

Which drowned it, and then he destroyed man and beast upon it, all except a few that were in mercy preserved.

Yet the LORD has promised and swore to it, that these waters shall no more go over the earth to destroy it.

He has set a bound for the sea that it cannot pass, by a decree of his.

Even the sand on the shore, which, as weak as it may seem to be, is a bound unpassable.

Though they may toss and rage and roar, they shall not prevail, nor pass over it, which is a perpetual miracle of mercy (Jer. 5:22).

In Genesis it says, God said and it was.

In John chapter 1, it says that the Word made it all.

In fact, it says that without Him, was not anything made that was made.

Psalm 136:7 "To him that made great lights: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

For the inhabitants of the world to walk and work by, to do all the business of life in a comfortable manner.

And which is an instance of mercy and goodness (see Gen. 1:14).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

These lights continuing for the benefit of mankind.

A more understanding way to say this would be the great containers for the Light.

The sun and the moon are two fixtures that we see light in, but they are not creative Light.

Jesus is that Light.

Jesus is the source of all Light.

His Light gives all things the power to exist.

Psalm 136:8 "The sun to rule by day: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

Which is the greater light (Genesis 1:16).

“For his mercy endureth for ever”:

This great light, so beneficial to the earth and its inhabitants, which was made nearly six thousand years ago, still continues, and will to the end of time.

Enlightening the world, warming the air and earth, imparting its light and heat to all of the creatures on it.

And influencing the earth to bring forth a variety of things for the use and delight of mankind, called “the precious things brought forth by the sun” (Deut. 33:14).

An emblem of a more beneficial light, in which the rich grace and mercy of God appear, and for which we have reason to give thanks.

Even the Son of righteousness, the Messiah, the light of the world, the author of the light of nature, grace, and glory.

And who will continue forever (even longer than the sun that shall be no more) Malachi 4:2.

Now we see the purpose in the sun.

It is to rule over the day.

The word endureth means continues to endure.

Psalm 136:9 "The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

The lesser lights, including the moon which receives all its light from the sun. (Gen. 1:16).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

In continuing these lights, so useful to men, as well as in making of them.

The moon and stars have their benign influences upon the earth, to produce things out of it useful to men (see Deut. 33:14).

And are of singular service to benighted travelers, and to those that go down to the sea in ships (see Acts 27:20).

The moon is an emblem of the church, that receives her light from Christ, the sun, and which will continue for ever.

And, stars are emblems of Gospel ministers, who are the means of enlightening dark souls.

And of refreshing disconsolate saints.

And are a continued mercy to an ignorant world, as well as to the church.

And will be continued as long as it stands (see SOS 6:10; Matt. 5:14).

The moon, being a lesser light, is to rule over the darkness.

All of these things were made to benefit man.

We can easily see why we can say His mercy endureth forever.

Verses 10-15:

The deliverance from Egypt is described (in Exodus 12-14).

Psalm 136:10 "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

In a tender part, in the dear part of themselves.

In both their sons and heirs, and those who were to inherit their lands and estates, and perpetuate their names.

This was an act of justice for using ill the Lord's firstborn, the people of Israel, slaying their sons, and refusing to let them go (Exodus 1:13).

And yet there was mercy in it, for which thanks were to be given to God.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

The Israelites, in a very merciful manner, were distinguished by the blood sprinkled on their door posts, when the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy their firstborn.

And when they were destroyed, it was owing to the kind providence of God that the Egyptians did not rise as one man to cut off the Israelites in vengeance.

And yet not a dog was suffered to move his tongue against them when the dismal cry was made.

This was the means of their deliverance, which could not be obtained by all the other plagues.

But now they not only bid them go, but were urgent upon them to be gone (Exodus 11:5).

This too was an act of love for His chosen.

He did this to make the Pharaoh let His people go.

His mercy was great in this, in the fact that the firstborn of the Hebrews was saved by the blood of the lamb over their door.

Psalm 136:11 "And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

A wicked and idolatrous people, among whom they suffered great hardships.

And this was done by means of God's judgments on them, and especially that before related.

And was an instance of the mercy of God, as follows, for which thanks should be given.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

And this is a proof of it, bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, the house of bondage.

When they cried unto him by reason of it, and he sent them a Savior to deliver them out of their distress (Exodus 2:23).

An emblem of the grace and mercy of God, in delivering his people from a worse fate than Egyptian bondage.

From the bondage of sin, Satan, the law, and through fear of death, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Psalm 136:12 "With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Exerting his power in a very open manner, and continuing it till he had effected the work.

Bringing his people out of Egypt, which is always ascribed to his great strength and mighty power (Exodus 13:3).

The redemption of the mystical Israel of God is by a mighty Redeemer, the LORD of hosts.

Who has redeemed them out of the hands of their enemies, that were stronger than they, and too strong for them.

The conversion of them is by the power of the grace of God, even by the exceeding greatness of his power, and yet both acts of grace and mercy.

“For his mercy endureth for ever”:

It was mercy that had the LORD stretch out his arm, show the strength of his right arm, and deliver Israel out of Egypt.

And in his love and in his pity he redeemed them (Isa. 63:9).

It is owing to the tender mercies of our God, and is a performing the mercy promised to the fathers, that Christ, the dayspring from on high, was sent to visit and redeem us (Luke 1:68).

And the regeneration, quickening, and conversion of sinners, are acts of mercy as well as of power (Eph. 2:4).

It was the mighty hand of God that brought them out.

He had mercy on them and delivered them from Egypt (the world).

Psalm 136:13 "To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

Into two parts, so that the waters of it stood as a wall on the right and left hand of the Israelites, as they passed through.

This was done by means of a strong east wind (Exodus 14:21).

The dividing it into parts was a wonderful work, and a rich display of mercy to Israel.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

The children of Israel were encompassed about, and in the utmost distress.

The rocks were on each side, Pharaoh and his host behind them, the Red sea before them; and so no visible way of escape.

But the LORD cut a way for them through the sea, and saved them.

The sea is an emblem of this world, which is like a tempestuous troubled sea.

Where everything is restless, fluctuating, and passing away.

Where the people of God are tossed with tempests.

And where afflictions, like the waves and billows of the sea, come over them one after another.

And through which they must pass and enter the kingdom.

And God, that wills, orders, and appoints them, sets these proud waves of the sea their bounds, or makes them a calm.

And, sooner or later, makes a way through them and out of them, which is owing to his enduring mercy (1 Cor. 10:13).

Psalm 136:14 "And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

Willingly, without reluctance; with great spirit and courage.

Done with the fearless of danger, and with the utmost safety, so that not one was lost in the passage (see Psalm 78:53).

And thus the Lord makes his people willing to pass through afflictions, he being with them.

And able to bear them, he putting underneath the everlasting arms, even when in the valley of the shadow of death.

And carries them safely through as He protects them.

The waters do not overflow them, nor the fire kindle upon them.

Nor are any suffered to be lost, but all come safe to land.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

To which, and to his never failing compassion, it is owing that they are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22).

He saw the terrible situation the Israelites were in, with their backs to the sea, and the Pharaoh facing them.

He had mercy on them and opened the Red sea for them to cross on dry land. He even held the Pharaoh back with His flame, until the Israelites had all crossed the Red sea.

Psalm 136:15 "But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

In the same sea which was parted for the Israelites, and through which they passed safely as on dry land.

Into which Pharaoh and his army entering in pursuit of them in their chariots, the LORD "shook" him and them out of them, as the word signifies.

And causing the waters to return and cover them; they were drowned in them (Exodus 14:28).

This was an emblem of the destruction of Satan, and of his principalities and powers.

By Christ, who thereby has saved his spiritual Israel out of their hands.

And of the casting of the sins of God's people into the depths of the sea, never to be seen more, or to appear any more against them to their condemnation.

And of the everlasting ruin and perdition of ungodly men.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

It was in mercy to Israel that both Pharaoh and his host were destroyed, who threatened them with ruin.

And therefore, they sung of judgment and of mercy, and gave thanks to God for this instance of his vengeance on their enemies, and of goodness to them (Exodus 15:1).

When the nearly 3 million Israelites had finished crossing over, the LORD removed the fire, and Pharaoh's chariots and soldiers followed into the sea.

When they were all in the sea, then the LORD released the walls of water and drowned all of Pharaoh's army.

Why?

Because His mercy toward Israel endures forever.

Psalm 136:16 "To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Where there was no path.

This the LORD did by going before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night.

To show them the way in which they should go (Exodus 13:21; see Psalm 78:14).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Among the manifold mercies of God, shown to Israel in the wilderness, this is one taken notice of by Nehemiah (Neh. 9:19).

That the pillar of cloud and fire, to direct them, never departed from them while in it.

And this act of "leading" them not only includes the guidance of them in the way, but the provision made for them.

Of water out of the rock, and of manna that fell about their tents every day.

And of flesh and feathered fowl, like dust, so that they wanted nothing.

And also the protection of them from their enemies.

All which were proofs of his constant care over them, and his continual mercy to them (see Psalm 78:15).

He led them with a fire by night and a cloud by day.

He has such tender mercy for them that even their shoes did not wear out in 40 years.

He fed them with bread from heaven, because of His great mercy toward them.

Psalm 136:17 "To him which smote great kings: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

Either the thirty one kings in the land of Canaan; or those who are after particularly mentioned.

Which seems best, since the kings of Canaan were petty kings, when these were greater ones.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

The smiting of those kings were in mercy to Israel.

Both to preserve them from falling into their hands, and that they might possess their countries, as is later declared.

Psalm 136:18 "And slew famous kings: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

Famous for their power and strength, their courage and valor who were not only smitten and discomfited, but slain in battle.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Towards his own people, for whose sake these kings were slain.

The LORD fought for Israel.

It did not make any difference that the king was great in the land.

Then God removed them from the way of the Israelites, because His mercy toward Israel will endure forever.

Psalm 136:19 "Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

A strong and warlike people, and their king a great and mighty one (see Psalm 135:11).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Since this king would not suffer Israel to go through his borders, so he came out and fought against them.

And had not the LORD smote him, they must have fallen a prey into his hands (Num. 21:23).

Verses 19-20:

See Numbers chapter 21 for the account of the capture of "Shihon" and "Og".

Psalm 136:20 "And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

A country large and fruitful, and the king of it of a gigantic stature (see Psalm 135:11).

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

For this mighty king came out against Israel, and threatened their destruction, and it was of the Lord's mercies they were not consumed by him.

And it may be observed, whenever tyrannical princes and oppressors are cut off, it is in mercy to the inhabitants of the earth, and especially to the people of God.

This is not just kings in general, but specific powerful rulers who God destroyed for passage for His chosen, Israel.

Psalm 136:21 "And gave their land for a heritage: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

This was taken away from them and their subjects by the LORD.

Who has the disposing of kingdoms, and given to another people, for an inheritance.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

While his justice is exercised on some, in a strict manner, with severity and rigor, his mercy is shown to others.

This may seem cruel to many, but God gave them time to repent, and they did not.

This was the land God had promised to their ancestor, Abraham, as a heritage.

God's Word is good.

Psalm 136:22 "[Even] a heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

The land of those that served idols, the LORD took and gave to Israel for an inheritance.

Who served him, the true God.

Thus the LORD rewards his servants in a way of grace and mercy, though not as of debt.

For it follows:

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

Aben Ezra and Kimchi make the mercy to lie in this peculiarly, that the lands of these kings were not in the covenant with Abraham.

Only the seven nations or kingdoms of Canaan, which are not here mentioned (Psalm 135:11).

But the Amorites were given in the covenant (Gen. 15:21).

And the one as the other were given as an inheritance to Israel.

And equally owing to the mercy of God (see Psalm 135:11).

And thus, the heavenly glory, of which Canaan was a type, is an inheritance owing to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ (Judges 1:21).

Israel was God's chosen people and this land had been their heritage since Abraham.

God does not have to explain to us why He does these things, but He does explain that His mercy toward Israel endures forever.

Psalm 136:23 "Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy [endureth] for ever:"

When we were few in number.

When we were a feeble people.

When we were a people unable to contend with such mighty foes.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

By all that he did for us when thus feeble.

By all his power put forth to defend us from our enemies, he has showed his mercy and kindness to us and to the world.

Psalm 136:24 "And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

Temporal enemies, tyrants, and oppressors.

And spiritual ones: sin, Satan, the world, the law, death, and hell.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

As is clearly seen in redemption by Jesus Christ, where mercy and truth have met together.

And which is a distinguishing mercy to the sons of men, not granted to angels.

The psalmist puts a little personal note in here by saying, our low estate.

Surely Israel was about as low as they could have gotten.

They were really slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and God brought them out to inherit this land.

Psalm 136:25 "Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

To all creatures.

The beasts of the field, and fowls of the air, the young ravens that cry (Psalm 145:15).

To all men their daily food.

To Jews and Gentiles, good men and bad men (Matt. 6:11).

And spiritual food to all that belong to Christ, who are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone.

Even himself, who is the bread of life, the wholesome truths of the Gospel, and all of its refreshing ordinances.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

He continues to have compassion on his creatures, and opens his hand of providence, and supplies their wants.

He is ever mindful of his covenant of grace and mercy, and therefore gives meat to them that fear him (Psalm 111:5).

Not only were the physical house of Israel fed with the bread from heaven, but the spiritual house of Israel can daily feed upon His Word (Bread).

Even all of our physical food comes from the miracle of God providing food for everyone from the earth.

Psalm 136:26 "O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

the Maker of it, in which the glory of his wisdom and power is displayed.

The possessor of it, where he dwells, has his throne, and keeps his court.

From whence all blessings, temporal and spiritual, come and where he has prepared glory and happiness for his people hereafter.

A house that is eternal in the heavens, an inheritance reserved there, with a better and a more enduring substance.

"For his mercy endureth for ever":

For though the above character is expressive of his sovereignty and dominion, yet he exercises it in a way of grace and mercy to the sons of men.

And therefore, they have reason to give thanks unto him and praise him for his kindness and favors shown to them on earth.

The God of heaven is the true God, who has mercy toward all His children that endures forever.

The very least we can do, is thank Him with everything within us.

Psalm 136 Questions

1. What is the psalmist doing, besides praising God?
2. What is God called in verse 2?
3. Who will Jesus be, when He returns to the earth to set up His kingdom?
4. How many miracles did Jesus do?
5. What are the two powers in the world?
6. Where do we find the statement, that The Word made it all?
7. The great lights in verse 7, were what?
8. Who is the source of all Light?
9. What was the sun made for?
10. What were the sun and moon made to benefit?
11. Who killed the firstborn of Egypt?
12. What saved the firstborn of the Hebrews?
13. How did He bring them out?
14. Why did God part the Red sea?
15. How did He hold Pharaoh and his men back, until the Israelites crossed the sea?
16. What happened to Pharaoh's men?
17. What did God use to lead the children of Israel across the wilderness?
18. Who were two specific rulers the Lord removed from before Israel?
19. Who had God originally promised this land of promise to?
20. Who were God's chosen people?
21. How did the psalmist put a little personal note on this?
22. What was the low estate they had been in?
23. What Bread should the Christians feed on?
24. Who is the God of heaven?