

PSALMS

Chapter 136

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; 4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever; 5 to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever; 6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever; 7 to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever; 8 the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever; 9 the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever; 10 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever; 11 and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever; 12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures forever; 13 to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever; 14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures forever; 15 but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures forever; 16 to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever; 17 to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever; 18 and killed mighty kings, for his steadfast love endures forever; 19 Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures forever; 20 and Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures forever; 21 and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures forever; 22 a heritage to Israel his servant, for his steadfast love endures forever. 23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever; 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever. 26 Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Ps 136 A liturgy of praise to the Lord as Creator and as Israel's Redeemer. Its theme and many of its verses parallel much of Ps 135. Most likely a Levitical song leader led the recital, while the Levitical choir (1Ch 16:41; 2Ch 5:13; Ezr 3:11) or the worshipers (2Ch 7:3, 6; 20:21) responded with the refrain (see 106:1; 107:1; 118:1–4, 29). This liturgy concludes the Great Hallel. Following the initial call to praise (vv. 1–3), the recital devotes six verses to God's creation acts (vv. 4–9), six to his deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (vv. 10–15), one to the desert journey (v. 16) and six to the conquest (vv. 17–22). The four concluding verses return to the same basic themes in reverse order: God's action in history in behalf of his people (vv. 23–24), God's action in the creation order (v. 25) and a closing call to praise (v. 26). (CSB)

The Lord's steadfast love endures.

Format: Vv 1–3, the God of gods; vv 4–9, wonders of creation; vv 10–16, wonders of the exodus; vv 17–22, wonders of the conquest; vv 23–25, God's loving care; v 26, closing. The psalm's refrain suggests that it was used liturgically in the temple, with a solo voice recounting God's works in the first half of the verse and the whole community responding with the recognition of His mercy in the second half. Simple oral responses were probably common, since many participants could not read written responses. (TLSB)

The 136th psalm is a psalm of thanks and is perhaps the text to show priests how they should sing and preach. Namely, they should sing and preach of God and his wonderful deeds, that he is gracious and merciful and a true Savior. Therefore, in each verse the psalmist repeats the line, “His steadfast love endures forever,” with which the psalm is nearly overwhelmed. Truly nothing but grace, not human works or doctrines, should ever be preached. For human works and words have done no wonders such as these. They are not deserving of this worship, but rather only the grace and pure goodness of him who gives all. Gift! Gifts, he says! Gift – free of charge! And Christ also satnds hidden in the phrase. Such doctrine keeps in the people a pure faith and a right understanding of grace and the forgiveness of sins, against rebellious and stiff-necked work-saints. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

love. It is a word which has the connotation of undeserved love and mercy, and it often refers to deeds of love and mercy which are a fulfillment of a covenant. The psalm summarizes the Lord’s covenant faithfulness to his people and calls upon them to praise him for his loving deeds. (PBC)

136:1 *give thanks* – The community is exhorted to give thankful praise to God for His goodness in Himself and as expressed in His works of creation and redemption detailed in this psalm. (TLSB)

steadfast love – The refrain, repeated in every verse, emphasizes God’s grace that is manifest with all of His works. (TLSB)

Hbr *chesed*, “loyalty” to one’s community; most common term for God’s grace in the Psalms (125 times). Luther described *chesed* as “goodness in action” (AE 14:50). God’s unwavering devotion to the salvation of His people finds its fulfillment in the cross of Christ. (TLSB p. 843)

136:2 *the God of gods*. The true God is above all the deities of false religions. (TLSB)

This invitation to praise reminds us of the Lord’s superiority over all imaginary gods, as proclaimed in Psalm 135. (PBC)

136:3 *Lord of Lords* – The true God is above all other authorities. (TLSB)

136:4-9 Praises the goodness and steadfast love of God as expressed in His creation. (TLSB)

136:5 *by understanding*. The story of creation is a story of God’s love. He made everything in the universe for the good of his people. Although the whole human race rebelled against him, the Lord continues to provide sun and rain, food and life for both the evil and the good. Although God gives daily bread even to the ungrateful, his people gladly acknowledge that the preservation of the earth and its blessings is a continued display of God’s love. (PBC)

136:7-9 Direct echoes of Ge 1:16. (CSB)

136:10-16 Describes God’s work of redemption in delivering His people from slavery in Egypt. (TLSB)

136:17-22 Describes God’s work of redemption in giving His people the Promised Land in their conquest of Canaan. (TLSB)

136:23–24 Probably a concluding summary of the deliverance recalled above, but may allude also to the deliverances experienced during the period of the judges and the reign of David. (CSB)

Describes God's works of redemption in His people's lives during their slavery, the exodus, the conquest, and today. (TLSB)

136:23 *low estate* – When God's people were slaves in Egypt. By extension, this also describes our fallen, sinful condition. (TLSB)

136:26 *the God of heaven*. A Persian title for God found frequently in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel. Its intent is similar to that of the language of vv. 2–3. (CSB)

Transcending everything mundane. Comprehensive listing of God's works and mercies culminates with His rule in heaven, where all His saints will enjoy His steadfast love forever. (TLSB)

Ps 136 This great psalm of thanksgiving praises God for His acts of creation and redemption, both in history and in the lives of His people. Every detail, at every stage, is a sign of God's steadfast love, which, throughout human history, endures forever. The psalm is all about God's action, not ours. • O, Lord, we thank You that as we live our lives, with all the highs and lows, joys and trials, Your steadfast love is there for us at every moment; it endures forever. Through Christ, our redemption. Amen. (TLSB)