

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship  
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by

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## Psalm 136 — Hallelujah! God's Love Is Everlasting!

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 136

- All commentators include Psalm 136 in the Great Hallel. It reinitiates the praise expressed in Psalms 113–118 (the Egyptian Hallel).
- A number of phrases tie this psalm to Psalm 135, making them a joint closure to the Psalms of Ascents and a joint opening of the final section of praises in the Psalter.
- Jewish celebrants sing Psalm 136 by itself, or with Psalm 135, on the morning of every Sabbath, on Passover evening, and for Hanukkah.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 136 (NAU)

- 136:1** Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 136:2** Give thanks to the God of gods,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 136:3** Give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 136:4** To Him who alone does great wonders,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 136:5** To Him who made the heavens with skill,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 136:6** To Him who spread out the earth above the waters,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 136:7** To Him who made *the* great lights,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting:
- 136:8** The sun to rule by day,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 136:9** The moon and stars to rule by night,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

**136:10** To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:11** And brought Israel out from their midst,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:12** With a strong hand and an outstretched arm,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.  
**136:13** To Him who divided the Red Sea asunder,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:14** And made Israel pass through the midst of it,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;  
**136:15** But He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.  
**136:16** To Him who led His people through the wilderness,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;  
**136:17** To Him who smote great kings,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:18** And slew mighty kings,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;  
**136:19** Sihon, king of the Amorites,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:20** And Og, king of Bashan,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:21** And gave their land as a heritage,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:22** Even a heritage to Israel His servant,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.  
**136:23** Who remembered us in our low estate,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
**136:24** And has rescued us from our adversaries,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting;  
**136:25** Who gives food to all flesh,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.  
**136:26** Give thanks to the God of heaven,  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

### **3.0 Understanding Psalm 136**


#### **3.1 Outline**

- I.** Summons to Give Thanks (vv. 1–3)
- II.** Thanks to the Shaper of All (vv. 4–9)
- III.** Thanks to the Sovereign of Israel (vv. 10–22)
- IV.** Thanks to the Savior of All (vv. 23–25)
- V.** Summons to Give Thanks (v. 26)



### 3.2 Notes

- **Comparison with Psalm 135**

<b>Psalm 135</b>	<b>Psalm 136</b> <i>(Every verse ends with: For His lovingkindness is everlasting)</i>
<b>1–3</b> Hallelujah! Praise . . .	<b>1–3</b> Give thanks . . .
<b>4</b> For the LORD has chosen . . .	<b>1</b> for He is good . . .
<b>5</b> the LORD is great . . . our Lord is above all gods.	<b>2–3</b> God of gods . . . Lord of lords
<b>6</b> Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,	<b>4</b> who alone does great wonders
<b>6–7</b> heaven . . . earth . . . seas . . . deeps . . . vapors . . . lightnings . . . rain . . . wind . . .	<b>5–9</b> heavens . . . earth . . . waters . . . great lights . . . sun . . . moon and stars . . .
<b>8</b> smote the firstborn of Egypt	<b>10</b> smote the Egyptians in their firstborn
<b>9</b> signs and wonders . . . Pharaoh	
	<b>11–12</b> brought Israel out
	<b>13–14</b> divided the Red Sea . . . made Israel pass through the midst of it
	<b>15</b> overthrew Pharaoh and his army
	<b>16</b> led His people through the wilderness
<b>10</b> smote many nations . . . mighty kings	<b>17–18</b> smote great kings . . . mighty kings
<b>11</b> Sihon . . . Og . . . all the kingdoms of Canaan	<b>19–20</b> Sihon . . . Og
<b>12</b> gave their land as a heritage . . . to Israel His people	<b>21–22</b> gave their land as a heritage . . . to Israel
<b>13</b> Your remembrance . . .	<b>23</b> Who remembered us
<b>14</b> will judge His people and will have compassion on His servants	<b>24</b> has rescued us from our adversaries
<b>15–18</b> the idols of the nations	
<b>19–20</b> bless the LORD	
<b>20</b> You who revere the LORD	<b>25</b> all flesh
<b>21</b> Blessed be the LORD . . . Who dwells in Jerusalem. Hallelujah!	<b>26</b> Give thanks to the God of heaven

- “Psalm 135 uses the recital to contrast the LORD and his people with the nations and their idols. Psalm 136 uses the recital to expound the steadfast love of the LORD.” — James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 418.
- **v. 1** “Give thanks”
  - “*Give thanks* is not the whole meaning of this word . . . : it basically means ‘confess’ or ‘acknowledge’ . . . , and therefore calls us to thoughtful grateful worship, spelling out what we know or have found of God’s glory and His deeds.” — Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*,

Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 457.

- Psalms 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, and 29 all use the same statement as here in 136:1.
- Psalm 135 utilized “praise” (135:1, 3, 21) and “bless” (135:19, 20).
- This psalm begins (vv. 1–3) and closes (v. 26) with a summons to “Give thanks.” The inclusio brackets the psalm and establishes its focus on thankful praise.
- **v. 1** “For His lovingkindness is everlasting.”
  - A better translation of “lovingkindness” (Hebrew: *hesed*) might be “loyal love.”
    - ✓ “When applied to God, it speaks of a divine commitment and loving concern which remain unchanging in the face of all human frailty and fickleness.” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 437.
  - See 2 Chronicles 5:13 for the earlier occurrence of this refrain at the dedication of the Temple.
    - ✓ See Psalm 118:1–3.
  - Compare Jeremiah 33:10–11.
  - The form of the psalm is antiphonal—perhaps the priests singing the first part of each line and the whole congregation responding with the refrain.
    - ✓ See 2 Chronicles 7:3, 6; Ezra 3:11.
  - *When is it good for the worshipper to utilize extensive repetition?*
- **vv. 2–3** “the God of gods . . . the Lord of lords”
  - Such descriptions of God provide a clear emphasis on His uniqueness—He is the one and only true God.
  - See Deuteronomy 10:17.
- **v. 5** “with skill”
  - God performed creation with great skill. Psalm 78:72 employs the same word to describe God’s shepherding of His people.
  - NAU translates the same word as “understanding” in Proverbs 3:19 and Jeremiah 10:12.
- **v. 23** “us . . . our”
  - For the first time in this psalm the psalmist utilizes the inclusive personal reference with first person plural pronouns. He and his company of worshippers identify personally with the recitation of praise and thanksgiving.
  - Believers read about God’s past deeds and affirm that He is still active on their behalf. What was true in the past is true today.



- **v. 24** “has rescued us”
  - The present and personal implications of God’s loyal love include the deliverance of His people just as He delivered them from Egypt in the past.
- **v. 25** “gives food to all flesh”
  - By these words the psalmist refers to God’s creation activity and its ongoing results (cp. Pss 104:14–15, 27–28; 145:15–16; 146:7; 147:9).
  - In the context verses 23–25 invert the order of verses 5–22:
    - Creation (5–9)
    - Deliverance of His people** (10–22)
    - Deliverance of His people** (23–24)
    - Creation (25)
- Thus, the psalmist focuses on deliverance by both the text’s format and its full description.
- **v. 26** “Give thanks”
  - As the psalm began, so it ends. In view of all that God is and has done, we have no option but to raise our voices in thanks and praise to Him.
  - All that God accomplishes in creation and in the deliverance of His people Israel reveals His steadfast, loyal love. All of His wonders comprise a history of His deeds of loyal love.
- **v. 26** “the God of heaven”
  - This exact title for God (*El Hashshamayim*) occurs only here in the entire Old Testament. Together with the earlier titles (vv. 1–3), it identifies God as the supreme Deity, who alone is God.
  - A similar title occurs as early as Abraham (Gen 24:3, 7).
    - ✓ Jonah uses a similar title in his confession (Jon 1:9). The last verse of the Hebrew Bible (2 Chron 36:23) employs the title along with a number of later texts (Ezra 1:2; 5:11, 12; 6:9, 10; 7:12, 21, 23; Neh 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20; Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44). Lastly, it is a title for God in Revelation 11:13 and 16:11.

#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 136

##### “Forever”

Words and Music by Chris Tomlin and Jesse Reeves; ©2000 Chris Tomlin

Give thanks to the Lord our God and King —  
His love endures forever.  
For He is good, He is above all things,  
His love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise.



With a mighty hand and outstretched arm  
His love endures forever.  
For the life that’s been reborn,  
His love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise.

Forever God is faithful,  
Forever God is strong;  
Forever God is with us —  
Forever.

From the rising to the setting sun,  
His love endures forever.  
By the grace of God we will carry on,  
His love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise.



## 5.0 Praying Psalm 136

- Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness and Your loyal love. [v. 1]
- Thank You, God, for giving light for the earth. [vv. 7–9]
- Thank You, Lord, for judging evil when You deliver Your people. [vv. 15, 17–20]
- Thank You, God of heaven, for rescuing us. [vv. 23, 26]

## 6.0 Applying Psalm 136

- All of God's deeds display His loving commitment to His people.
- The past history of God's works possesses present implications for us.
- We must confess God's goodness, greatness, and grace.

One night in February 358 A.D. the church father Athanasius held an all-night service at his church in Alexandria, Egypt. He had been leading the fight for the eternal sonship and deity of Jesus Christ, knowing that the survival of Christianity depended on it. He had many enemies—for political even more than theological reasons—and they moved the power of the Roman government against him. That night the church was surrounded by soldiers with drawn swords. People were frightened. With calm presence of mind Athanasius announced the singing of Psalm 136. The vast congregation responded, thundering forth twenty-six times, “His love endures forever.” When the soldiers burst through the doors they were staggered by the singing. Athanasius kept his place until the congregation was dispersed. Then he too disappeared in the darkness and found refuge with his friends.

Many citizens of Alexandria were killed that night, but the people of Athanasius' congregation never forgot that although man is evil, God is good. He is superlatively good, and “his love endures forever.”

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols.  
(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1185