



Jan. 14, 2024

Forever God is Faithful

I. IMPACT

- A. **In Our Minds:** God’s faithful love endures throughout all generations, and He is forever worthy of our thanks & praise!
- B. **In the Old Testament**
 1. The opening line (v. 1) was first coined by **David** to celebrate the ark’s installation in Zion. 1 Chr 16:34.
 2. The line was repeated at key points in Israel’s history, including:
 - a. Consecration of Solomon’s Temple. 2 Chr 5:13
 - b. Consecration of the Second Temple. Ezra 3:11
 3. The line is used in several pss (106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29 (cf. Jer 33:11) with Ps 136 developing its usage the most.
- C. **In Judaism**
 1. Ps 136 was labeled “The Great Hallel” (praise).
 2. It is traditionally chanted in the introduction to Sabbath meetings as well as at holiday events such as **Passover**.
- D. **In the Church**
 1. Ps 136 has inspired a large number of Christian hymns & songs.
 2. Classic hymns include, “Let Us With Gladsome Mind” (Milton), and “Give to Our God Immortal Praise” (Watts).
 3. A well-known modern spinoff is Chris Tomlin’s, “Forever.”

PSALM 136 <small>© M. Scott Bashlow 2024</small>		PURPOSE: While rifting 26 times about God’s endless loyal love, the psalmist calls on Israel to thank Yahweh for His ancient works of creation and redemption, showing lovingkindness to His people throughout all generations, even after the Exile.		Type: Corporate Song of Praise Date: Probably after 2 nd Temple construction, c. 516 B.C. Notes: Known as “The Great Hallel” in Jewish tradition. Intended to be sung antiphonally.	
THREE-FOLD CALL TO GIVE THANKS vv. 1-3	REASONS TO GIVE THANKS: GOD’S MIGHTY WORKS IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION vv. 4-25				CONCLUDING CALL TO GIVE THANKS v. 26
Thanks for Yahweh’s Goodness v. 1 Thanks for His Supremacy vv. 2-3 As the God above all Gods v. 2 As the Lord above all Lords v. 3	God’s Ancient Work in the World’s Creation vv. 4-9 His Wonder-Working Power in Creating the Heavens & Earth v. 4-6 <i>His Unique Agency</i> v. 4 <i>His Skillful Craftsmanship</i> vv. 5-6 His Wonder-Working Power in Creating the Lights of Heaven vv. 7-9	God’s Ancient Work in Israel’s Redemption vv. 10-22 Israel’s Deliverance Out of Egypt vv. 10-15 <i>After the 10th Plague</i> vv. 10-12 <i>Thru the Red Sea</i> vv. 13-15 Israel’s Entrance into the Promised Land vv. 16-22 <i>Leading Them thru the Wilderness</i> v. 16 <i>Defeating Pagan Kings for Them</i> vv. 17-20 <i>Giving Them the Land as Their Inheritance</i> vv. 21-22	God’s Renewed Work in Israel’s Redemption vv. 23-25 His Deliverance of the Exiled Generation vv. 23-24 His Gracious Provision for All Flesh v. 25	Thanks to the God of Heaven (post-exilic title) v. 26	

II. GENRE: Song of Corporate **Praise**

A. Hymns of praise and songs of thanks differ in their overall structure. In this ps, the command is to “give thanks” instead of “praise,” but the structure of the psalm clearly fits a hymn of praise.

1. Opening call to praise (vv. 1-3)
2. Reasons for praise (vv. 4-25)
3. Concluding call to praise (v. 26)
4. Ps 136 is often called a song of remembrance because of its recounting of Israel’s history, but this is a feature not a genre.

III. SETTING

A. AUTHOR & BACKGROUND

1. The psalm is anonymous, an “orphan psalm.”
2. Most believe Ps 136 was written during the 2nd Temple period (after 516 BC). Many pss in Book V come from this period.
3. The divine title, “God of **Heaven**” (v. 26) did not come into usage until during the exile. Ezra 1:2; Neh. 1:4

B. PLACEMENT

1. Pss 135 & 136 are twins, sharing many lines. In some Jewish traditions, they both comprise “The Great Hallel.” They create an outer frame for the pilgrim “Songs of Ascents” (120-134).
2. Ps 137 takes the reader back into the world of **lament**, reminding the worship that joyful praise is not the constant mood of godly people.

C. **PERFORMANCE:** This song is clearly meant to be antiphonal. The worship leader would intone the first line of a verse and the people would sing the chorus in response. (See Ps 118:1-4.) Or, perhaps the refrain could be sung in the background as main lines were sung.

III. COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS

A. **Grand Repetition:** Ps 136 is by far the most repetitive portion of the Bible. When sung creatively and earnestly, it would not be a vain repetition.

B. Fantastic Refrain

1. **Yes, **Indeed**:** The word “for” in the refrain (“for his loving-kindness is everlasting”) could better be rendered, “Indeed.” The chorus asserts again and again the operating principle behind each of God’s actions.
2. **Various Translations:** a number of translations of the refrain are possible. Apart from the NASB, some are:
 - a. His love is eternal (HCSB)
 - b. His steadfast love endures forever (ESV)
 - c. His love endures forever (NIV)
 - d. His mercy endures forever (NKJV)
 - e. His loyal love endures (NET)
 - f. His love has no end

D. **Shorter than It Seems.** While the repeated refrain might feel cumbersome to us, in Hebrew it is much shorter, requiring only a few syllables: *ki le’olam hasdo*. Moreover, the first half of each verse is also short, seldom longer than three Hebrew words.

C. **God Focused.** While many vv. speak of Israel’s experience, they are all written to speak of God’s actions. He is the great Doer.

D. **Then and Now.** In much of the song, the psalmist speaks of Israel’s past. But v. 23 mentions “us.” This speaks of the author & his fellow Jews after the exile who knew the same faithful God was with them.

E. **From Creation to Redemption:** This ps takes the worshipper back to the beginning of time (vv. 4-9) and on into God’s redemption of His people (vv. 10-25). By connecting these, the psalmist shows us that God’s people matter, that they are not lost in the vast creation. In fact, the redemption of His people is a kind of new **creation**.