

## PSALM 136

Psalm 136 is a psalm of grateful thanks to Yahweh for his goodness to Israel. Its distinguishing feature is the identical refrain found at the end of every verse, and perhaps one that was sung responsively, in this case, by the congregation. There are two recorded instances of this refrain having been sung in the past. The first, in 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, occurred at the dedication of the temple. When the glory of Yahweh filled the temple, the people bowed down in great awe, worshiping and singing this very refrain. The second instance is found in 2 Chronicles 20:21. King Jehoshaphat was being attacked by the people of Amon, Moab, and Mount Seir. But Yahweh promised him victory, and Jehoshaphat therefore appointed singers to recite this refrain as they went out before the army.

In the Hebrew language, the key word in the refrain is *chésedh*, for which no single English or other language equivalent can be found. The KJV translates it "mercy." The RSV prefers "steadfast love." Leupold believes, with Koenig, that "covenant-faithfulness" comes close to catching the exact flavor of the word; but that being rather cumbersome, "kindness" seems to him the best alternative. The NASB, used below, has added the word "loving" to that.

- 1 Give thanks to YAHWEH, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 4 To Him who alone does great wonders, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 5 to Him who made the heavens with skill, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 6 to Him who spread out the earth above the waters, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 7 to Him who made *the* great lights, for His lovingkindness is everlasting:
- 8 the sun to rule by day, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 9 the moon and stars to rule by night, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
  
- 10 To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 11 and brought Israel out from their midst, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 13 To Him who divided the Red Sea asunder, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 15 but He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,  
for His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 16 To Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;
- 17 to Him who smote great kings, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 18 and slew mighty kings, for His lovingkindness is everlasting:
- 19 Sihon, king of the Amorites, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 20 and Og, king of Bashan, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,
- 21 and gave their land as a heritage, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,

22 Even a heritage to Israel His servant, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.

23 Who remembered us in our low estate, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,  
24 and has rescued us from our adversaries, for His lovingkindness is everlasting;  
25 who gives food to all flesh, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.  
26 Give thanks to the God of heaven, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.

#### PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for your mighty works on behalf of your people Israel. We marvel at how you rescued them from bondage in Egypt, subdued all their enemies, and provided for all their needs. We rejoice at the thought of their final rescue when Jesus comes again in power and great glory to redeem them from their sin for all eternity. The angels in heaven gaze with wonder upon that mighty work of salvation purchased with the blood of Christ. It is only insensible man, for whose benefit it was wrought, who will scarce bestow a thought. Let the light of the gospel shine in the hearts of unrepentant sinners, that they may see their lost condition and their need of a Savior, Jesus, the only mediator between God and man. May your Holy Spirit draw them to the cross. Amen.*