

Psalms 136:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Analysis

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good—The psalm opens with a liturgical call to corporate worship. The Hebrew טוב (tov) means not merely moral goodness but comprehensive excellence, beauty, and beneficence. This is Yahweh's essential character, not a temporary mood.

For his mercy endureth for ever (כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ, ki l'olam chasdo)—The refrain repeated in all 26 verses makes this the "Great Hallel" sung at Passover (the psalm Jesus sang before Gethsemane, Matthew 26:30). Chesed is God's covenant loyalty, steadfast love, and unfailing kindness—the very foundation of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. The phrase l'olam means "forever" or "to the age," emphasizing the eternal, unchanging nature of God's faithful love despite Israel's repeated unfaithfulness.

Historical Context

Psalms 136 is a liturgical hymn likely used in Temple worship during the Second Temple period, though it may contain older material. The antiphonal structure (call-and-response) suggests it was sung by Levitical choirs with congregational participation. The psalm recounts salvation history from creation through the Exodus to the conquest of Canaan, teaching theology through Israel's historical experience of God's chesed.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God's chesed (loyal covenant love) as eternal and unchanging affect your response to personal difficulties or doubts?
2. The refrain is repeated 26 times—what spiritual discipline might God be teaching through such deliberate repetition in worship?

Interlinear Text

הוֹדוּ	לַיהוָה	כִּי	טוֹב	כִּי	לְעוֹלָם
O give thanks	unto the LORD	H3588	for he is good	H3588	endureth for ever
H3034	H3068		H2896		H5769
חֲסִדּוֹ:					
for his mercy					
H2617					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 118:1 (Grace): O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.

Psalms 106:1 (Grace): Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

1 Chronicles 16:41 (Grace): And with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever;

1 Chronicles 16:34 (Grace): O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

Psalms 107:1 (Grace): O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

2 Chronicles 20:21 (Grace): And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.

2 Chronicles 7:3 (Grace): And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

Ezra 3:11 (Grace): And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

Luke 1:50 (Grace): And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Jeremiah 33:11 (Grace): The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.