

Psalms 136:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Analysis

To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. The psalmist moves from heavens to earth, celebrating God's formation of habitable land. **"Stretched out the earth"** (לִרְקַע הָאֲרֶץ/leroqa ha'arets) uses רָקַע (raqa), to spread out, stamp, or stretch like hammering metal into a sheet. This recalls Genesis 1:9 where God gathered waters, allowing dry land to appear. The image suggests divine craftsmanship—God as smith hammering out the earth's surface.

"Above the waters" (עַל-הַמַּיִם/al-hamayim) reflects ancient Near Eastern cosmology where waters threatened chaos but God established earth securely above them. Genesis 1:2 pictures primordial waters; God's creative act organized chaos into order, establishing firm ground for life. The preposition עַל (al, upon/above) suggests earth's stability despite surrounding waters—God's wisdom maintains order against entropic dissolution.

Again, **"for his mercy endureth for ever"** connects creation to covenant faithfulness. Earth's stability isn't mechanical but relational—God's loyal love sustains creation. The same chesed that holds earth above waters holds His people secure amid life's threatening floods (Psalm 46:1-3, Isaiah 43:2). Every stable step we take witnesses to God's enduring mercy.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern creation myths (Enuma Elish, Atrahasis) depicted creation as divine conflict—gods warring, defeating chaos monsters, forming earth from slain enemies. By contrast, Israel's account presents sovereign God effortlessly ordering creation by His word. The emphasis on wisdom and purpose (not violence and conflict) distinguished Israel's theology. God's stretching out earth above waters demonstrates authority over chaos, providing secure dwelling for humanity. This would comfort exiles far from homeland, assuring that the God who established earth's foundations would restore Israel.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the image of God 'stretching out the earth above the waters' (establishing order from chaos) speak to areas of disorder and chaos in your life?
2. What does it mean that God's mercy (chesed) sustains the physical creation—how does this inform Christian environmental stewardship?
3. In what ways have you experienced God's stabilizing presence when 'waters' of difficulty threatened to overwhelm you?

Interlinear Text

לְרַק ע	הָ אֶרֶץ	עַל	הַמַּיִם	כִּי	לְעוֹלָם
To him that stretched out	the earth	H5921	above the waters	H3588	endureth for ever
H7554	H776		H4325		H5769
חֲסִדּוֹ:					
for his mercy					
H2617					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 24:2 (Parallel theme): For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

Jeremiah 10:12 (Parallel theme): He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.

Genesis 1:9 (Parallel theme): And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

Isaiah 42:5 (Parallel theme): Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

Isaiah 44:24 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

Job 26:7 (Parallel theme): He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

Zechariah 12:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Isaiah 40:22 (Parallel theme): It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

Job 37:18 (Parallel theme): Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass?

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org