

Psalms 136:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:

Analysis

Creation's Luminaries and Eternal Mercy

This verse celebrates God's establishment of the sun as the greater light to govern the day, with the refrain "for his mercy endureth for ever" (ki le-olam chasdo). The Hebrew word *chesed* (חֶסֶד) encompasses loyal love, covenant faithfulness, and steadfast mercy—God's unwavering commitment to His people. The phrase *le-olam* (לְעוֹלָם) means "forever" or "for eternity," appearing in every verse of Psalm 136's 26 verses, creating a powerful liturgical rhythm.

The sun's appointment "to rule by day" (*limshelet ba-yom*) echoes Genesis 1:16-18, where God created the greater light to govern the day. The Hebrew verb *mashal* (to rule, govern) indicates orderly administration—the sun doesn't randomly shine but follows God's established patterns. This reliable celestial order demonstrates God's faithful character: just as the sun rises daily without fail, so God's mercy never fails.

Connecting creation's order to divine mercy is theologically profound. The same God who established the sun's reliable course also establishes His covenant faithfulness. Natural law reflects spiritual law: God's mercy is as dependable as sunrise. For ancient Israel—and for us—this provides assurance that God's character doesn't fluctuate with circumstances. His *chesed* endures eternally, as constant as the sun He created.

Historical Context

The Great Hallel and Temple Worship

Psalm 136, known as the "Great Hallel," was central to Jewish worship and is still recited at Passover. Its responsive structure—with one voice reciting God's mighty acts and the congregation responding "for his mercy endureth for ever"—indicates liturgical use in temple worship. This antiphonal pattern created a powerful corporate worship experience, with the repeated refrain reinforcing God's unchanging character.

The psalm systematically recounts salvation history: creation (verses 4-9), the Exodus (verses 10-15), wilderness wanderings (verse 16), conquest of Canaan (verses 17-22), and ongoing provision (verses 23-25). Verse 8, celebrating the sun's creation, appears in the creation section, reminding worshipers that the God who delivered them from Egypt is the same God who created the cosmos. His power in redemption matches His power in creation.

This psalm's emphasis on enduring mercy would have been particularly meaningful during difficult periods of Israel's history—exile, foreign domination, or temple destruction. When circumstances seemed to contradict God's faithfulness, this liturgy affirmed that His *chesed* transcends historical setbacks. The sun still rises; God's mercy still endures.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does connecting God's creative power (establishing the sun) with His mercy deepen our understanding of His character?

2. What significance does the daily, unchanging sunrise have for our faith in God's faithful provision?
3. How can incorporating responsive readings or refrains like 'His mercy endures forever' enrich our personal or corporate worship?
4. In what areas of life do we need to trust that God's mercy is as reliable as the sun's rising?
5. How does understanding creation's order as an expression of God's covenant faithfulness affect how we view natural laws and scientific discovery?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	הַ שֶּׁשֶּׁשׁ	לְמַמְשָׁלָהּ	בַּיּוֹם	וְ	לְעוֹלָם	חַסְדּוֹ:
H853	The sun	to rule	by day	H3588	endureth for ever	for his mercy
	H8121	H4475	H3117		H5769	H2617

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 148:3 (Parallel theme): Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.