

PSALM 136

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 136

This psalm was very probably composed by David, and given to the Levites to sing every day, (^{<13641>}1 Chronicles 16:41). Solomon his son followed his example, and made use of them in singing at the dedication of the temple, (^{<4008>}2 Chronicles 7:3,6); as Jehoshaphat seems to have done when he went out to war against his enemies, (^{<4021>}2 Chronicles 20:21). The subject of it is much the same with the preceding psalm; its composition is very singular; the half of every verse: in it is, “for his mercy endureth for ever”; this is the burden of the song; and the design of it is to show, that all blessings of every kind flow from the grace, goodness, and mercy of God, which is constant and perpetual; and to impress a sense of it upon the minds of men: the inscription of the Syriac version is,

“it is said of Moses and Israel praising the Lord for those who were delivered; and concerning the deliverance of souls out of hell from Pharaoh, the devil, by Christ our Saviour, the Redeemer of them.”

R. Obadiah says it is an exhortation to the children of God in the days of the Messiah to praise the Lord.

Ver. 1. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he [is] good*, etc.] In himself, and to all his creatures; and especially to his chosen people, who therefore should give thanks to him daily in the name of Christ, for all blessings temporal and spiritual, in faith and fervency, and in the sincerity of their souls, with their whole heart;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; it is the same with his love, which is from everlasting to everlasting; and continues notwithstanding the sins of his people, the hidings of his face from them, and his chastisements of them; the covenant which is founded on mercy, and all the blessings of it, which are the sure mercies of David, last for ever; and hence the vessels of mercy shall certainly be saved, and not lost; (see ^{<3941>}Psalm 106:1 107:1).

Ver. 2. *O give thanks unto the God of gods*, etc.] Not only of the gods of the Gentiles, who are by name and not by nature gods; or of civil

magistrates, who are so called, and seem to be designed in the next verse; but the angels, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi. Christ, our Immanuel, is the God of them, the object of their worship and adoration, being their Creator and Preserver, (^{<3970>}Psalm 97:7 ^{<3006>}Hebrews 1:6,7). So the Heathens say^{f1813} of the Maker of all things, him you may properly call the God of gods, the Supreme and Best; this title Janus has with them^{f1814};

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; in the preservation of those excellent creatures from apostasy, when many of their species fell; and in the continuance and confirmation of them in the state in which they were created; and in making use of them as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation; and as a guard about them while they live, and at death to convey their souls to heaven.

Ver. 3. *O give thanks to the Lord of lords*, etc.] Which is not only the title of the God of Israel, as the former, (^{<6007>}Deuteronomy 10:17); but of the Messiah, (^{<6096>}Revelation 19:16); who is the Prince of the kings of the earth; under whom they are, by whom they reign, and to whom they are accountable, being higher than they; as nature, so by office, (^{<6005>}Revelation 1:5 ^{<2085>}Proverbs 8:15,16) (^{<3827>}Psalm 89:27);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; in putting it into the hearts of kings and princes, which he has in his hands, to show favour to his people, even to be their nursing fathers; and in curbing the power, restraining the wrath, of oppressors; and protecting his people from their rage and violence.

Ver. 4. *To him who alone doeth great wonders*, etc.] As in the works of creation at first, having no help from angels or men; so in the works of providence, many of which are unsearchable, and past finding out, and in which he has no assistance from creatures; and in the works of grace, redemption, and salvation, which his own arm has wrought out; as well as what he did when here on earth in our nature; the miracles then wrought by his omnipotent arm alone; and even all the wonders which Moses and Elijah did under the Old Testament, and the apostles of Christ under the New, were done, not by their power, but by his alone; who will do still greater wonders, when he shall create all tidings new, raise the dead, and summon all nations before him, and render to everyone according to his works;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever: towards his people, for whose sake all these wonders are wrought.

Ver. 5. *To him that by wisdom made the heavens*, etc.] In such a curious manner, in such a proper and delightful situation, with such furniture, and for such uses, (^{<1089>}Proverbs 3:19);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; which appears in the continued influences of the heaven; the dew, rain, and snow, that descend from it on the earth to water and make it fruitful, and to produce those rich and valuable blessings called the “precious things of heaven”, (^{<6313>}Deuteronomy 33:13); and which are of the utmost importance for the service of man and beast: and, besides, God has of his infinite mercy, which continues, provided an inheritance in the heavens, a house eternal in the heavens, mansions of bliss and glory there, which Christ is now preparing for his saints, that they may dwell with him in them for evermore.

Ver. 6. *To him that stretcheth out the earth above the waters*, etc.] Or, “besides the waters”^{>f1815}, close by them, and yet secures the earth from being covered with them; (see ^{<6912>}Psalm 24:2);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; it was in mercy he caused the waters to go off the earth which first covered it; that trees, plants, and herbs, might spring up out of it, and that it might be a fit habitation for man; and though for the sins of the old world these waters were let in upon it, which drowned it, and destroyed man and beast upon it, except a few that were in mercy preserved; yet the Lord has promised and sworn to it, that these waters shall no more go over the earth to destroy it; he has set a bound for the sea that it cannot pass, by a decree of his; even the sand on the shore, which, as weak as it may seem to be, is a bound unpassable; though they may toss and rage and roar, they shall not prevail, nor pass over it, which is a perpetual miracle of mercy, (^{<2452>}Jeremiah 5:22).

Ver. 7. *To him that made great lights*, etc.] For the inhabitants of the world to walk and work by, to do all the business of life in a comfortable manner; and which is an instance of mercy and goodness; see (^{<0014>}Genesis 1:14-16);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; these lights continuing for the benefit of mankind.

Ver. 8. *The sun to rule by day*, etc.] Which is the greater light, (^{<0016>}Genesis 1:16);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever: this great light, so beneficial to the earth and the inhabitants of it, which was made near six thousand years ago, still continues, and will to the end of time; enlightening the world, warming the air and earth, imparting its light and heat to all creatures on it, and influencing the earth to bring forth a variety of things for the use and delight of mankind, called “the precious things [brought] forth by the sun”, (^{<1634>}Deuteronomy 33:14); an emblem of a more beneficial light, in which the rich grace and mercy of God appear, and for which we have reason to give thanks; even the sun of righteousness, the Messiah, the light of the world, the author of the light of nature, grace, and glory; and who will continue as long as the sun, and when that shall be no more, (^{<3042>}Malachi 4:2 ^{<4921>}Psalm 72:17).

Ver. 9. *The moon and stars to rule by night*, etc.] The lesser lights, and which indeed receive all their light Front the sun, (^{<0016>}Genesis 1:16);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; in continuing these lights, so useful to men, as well as in making of them: the moon and stars have their benign influences upon the earth, to produce things out of it useful to men; (see ^{<1634>}Deuteronomy 33:14 ^{<8381>}Job 38:31); and are of singular service to benighted travellers, and to those that go down to the sea in ships; (see ^{<4071>}Acts 27:20). The moon is an emblem of the church, that receives her light from Christ, the sun, and which will continue for ever; and, stars are emblems of Gospel ministers, who are the means of enlightening dark souls, and of refreshing disconsolate saints; and are a continued mercy to an ignorant world, as well as to the church, and will be continued as long as it stands; (see ^{<2760>}Song of Solomon 6:10 ^{<6113>}Revelation 1:20 2:1) (^{<4154>}Matthew 5:14 28:20).

Ver. 10. *To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn*, etc.] In a tender part, in the dear part of themselves, in their sons and heirs, and who were to inherit their lands and estates, and perpetuate their names; this was an act of justice for using ill the Lord’s firstborn, the people of Israel, slaying their sons, and refusing to let them go, (^{<0013>}Exodus 1:13,14,16,22 4:22,23); and yet there was mercy in it, for which thanks were to be given to God;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; the Israelites, in a very merciful manner, were distinguished by the blood sprinkled on their door posts, when the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy their firstborn; and when they were destroyed, it was owing to the kind providence of God that the Egyptians did not rise as one man to cut off the

Israelites in vengeance; and yet not a dog was suffered to move his tongue against them when the dismal cry was made; yea, this was the means of their deliverance, which could not be obtained by all the other plagues; but now they not only bid them go, but were urgent upon them to be gone, (^{<0115>}Exodus 11:5-7 12:22,23,29-33).

Ver. 11. *And brought out Israel from among them*, etc.] A wicked and idolatrous people, among whom they suffered great hardships; and this was done by means of God's judgments on them, and especially that before related; and was an instance of the mercy of God, as follows, for which thanks should be given;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; and this is a proof of it, bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, the house of bondage; when they cried unto him by reason of it, and he sent them a Saviour to deliver them out of their distress, (^{<0123>}Exodus 2:23 15:13 20:1); an emblem of the grace and mercy of God, in delivering his people from a worse than Egyptian bondage; from the bondage of sin, Satan, the law, and through fear of death, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Ver. 12. *With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm*, etc.] Exerting his power in a very open manner, and continuing it till he had effected the work; bringing his people out of Egypt, which is always ascribed to his great strength and mighty power, (^{<0133>}Exodus 13:3,9 15:6,16) (^{<0211>}Exodus 32:11). The redemption of the mystical Israel of God is by a mighty Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; who has redeemed them out of the hands of their enemies, that were stronger than they, and too strong for them: the conversion of them is by the power of the grace of God, even by the exceeding greatness of his power, and yet both acts of grace and mercy;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; it was mercy put the Lord on stretching out his arm, and showing the strength of his right hand, in delivering Israel out of Egypt; and in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, (^{<2319>}Isaiah 63:9). It is owing to the tender mercies of our God, and is a performing the mercy promised to the fathers, that Christ, the dayspring from on high, was sent to visit and redeem us, (^{<0168>}Luke 1:68,72,78); and the regeneration, quickening, and conversion of sinners, are acts of mercy as well as of power, (^{<0104>}Ephesians 2:4,5 ^{<0103>}1 Peter 1:3).

Ver. 13. *To him which divided the Red sea into parts*, etc.] Into two parts, so that the waters of it stood as a wall on the right and left hand of the

Israelites, as they passed through; this was done by means of a strong east wind, (^{<124>}Exodus 14:21,22). The Jews have a tradition, which Jarchi, Kimchi, and Arama, make mention of, that the sea was divided into twelve parts, according to the twelve tribes of Israel, and every tribe had a path by itself to walk in; but for this there is no foundation: however, the dividing it into parts was a wonderful work, and a rich display of mercy to Israel;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; the children of Israel were encompassed about, and in the utmost distress: the rocks were on each side, Pharaoh and his host behind them, the Red sea before them; and so no visible way of escape; but the Lord cut a way for them through the sea, and saved them. The sea is an emblem of this world, which is like a tempestuous troubled sea; where everything is restless, fluctuating, and passing away; where the people of God are tossed with tempests; and where afflictions, like the waves and billows of the sea, come over them one after another; and through which they must pass and enter the kingdom: and God, that wills, orders, and appoints them, sets these proud waves of the sea their bounds, or makes them a calm; and, sooner or later, makes a way through them and out of them, which is owing to his enduring mercy, (^{<613>}1 Corinthians 10:13).

Ver. 14. *And made Israel to pass through the midst of it*, etc.] Willingly, without reluctance; with great spirit and courage, fearless of danger, and with the utmost safety, so that not one was lost in the passage; (see ^{<1783>}Psalms 78:53); and thus the Lord makes his people willing to pass through afflictions, he being with them; and able to bear them, he putting underneath the everlasting arms, even when in the valley of the shadow of death; and carries safely through them, so that they are not hurt by them; the waters do not overflow them, nor the fire kindle upon them; nor are any suffered to be lost, but all come safe to land;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; to which, and to his never failing compassion, it is owing that they are not consumed, (^{<212>}Lamentations 3:22,23).

Ver. 15. *But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea*, etc.] In the same sea which was parted for the Israelites, and through which they passed safely as on dry land; into which Pharaoh and his army entering in pursuit of them in their chariots, the Lord “shook”^{f1816} him and them out of them, as the word signifies; and causing the waters to return and cover them; they were drowned in them, (^{<1248>}Exodus 14:28-31). This was an

emblem of the destruction of Satan, and of his principalities and powers, by Christ, who thereby has saved his spiritual Israel out of their hands; and of the casting of the sins of God's people into the depths of the sea, never to be seen more, or to appear any more against them to their condemnation; and of the everlasting ruin and perdition of ungodly men;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; it was in mercy to Israel that Pharaoh and his host were destroyed, who threatened them with ruin; and therefore they sung of judgment and of mercy, and gave thanks to God for this instance of his vengeance on their enemies, and of goodness to them, (^{<0210>}Exodus 15:1).

Ver. 16. *To him which led his people through the wilderness*, etc.] Where there was no path. This the Lord did by going before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night, to show them the way in which they should go, (^{<0220>}Exodus 13:21,22); (see ^{<07814>}Psalm 78:14);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; among the manifold mercies of God, shown to Israel in the wilderness, this is one taken notice of by Nehemiah, (^{<1019>}Nehemiah 9:19); that the pillar of cloud and fire, to direct them, never departed from them while in it: and this act of "leading" them not only includes the guidance of them in the way, but the provision made for them; of water out of the rock, and of manna that fell about their tents every day; and of flesh and feathered fowl, like dust, so that they wanted nothing; and also the protection of them from their enemies: all which were proofs of his constant care over them, and continual mercy to them; (see ^{<07815>}Psalm 78:15,16,24,25,27).

Ver. 17. *To him which smote great kings*, etc.] Either the thirty one kings in the land of Canaan; or those who are after particularly mentioned; which seems best, since the kings of Canaan were petty kings, when these were greater ones;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; the smiting of those kings were in mercy to Israel; both to preserve them from falling into their hands, and that they might possess their countries, as is later declared.

Ver. 18. *And slew famous kings*, etc.] Famous for their power and strength, their courage and valour who were not only smitten and discomfited, but slain in battle;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; towards his own people, for whose sake these kings were slain.

Ver. 19. *Sihon king of the Amorites*, etc.] A strong and warlike people, and their king a great and mighty one; (see ^{<4051>}Psalm 135:11);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; since this king would not suffer Israel to go through his borders, but came out and fought against them; and had not the Lord smote him, they must have fallen a prey into his hands, (^{<4023>}Numbers 21:23).

Ver. 20. *And Og the king of Bashan*, etc.] A country large and fruitful, and the king of it of a gigantic stature, (see ^{<4051>}Psalm 135:11);

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; for this mighty king came out against Israel, and threatened their destruction, and it was of the Lord's mercies they were not consumed by him. And it may be observed, whenever tyrannical princes and oppressors are cut off, it is in mercy to the inhabitants of the earth, and especially to the people of God.

Ver. 21. *And gave their land for an heritage*, etc.] This was taken away from them and their subjects by the Lord, who has the disposing of kingdoms, and given to another people, for an inheritance;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; while his justice is exercised on some, in a strict manner, with severity and rigour, his mercy is shown to others.

Ver. 22. *[Even] an heritage unto Israel his servant*, etc.] The land of those that served idols, the Lord took and gave to Israel for an inheritance, who served him, the true God. Thus the Lord rewards his servants in a way of grace and mercy, though not as of debt; for it follows,

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; Aben Ezra and Kimchi make the mercy to lie in this peculiarly, that the lands of these kings were not in the covenant with Abraham; only the seven nations or kingdoms of Canaan, which are not here mentioned, as in (^{<4051>}Psalm 135:11); but the Amorites were given in the covenant, (^{<4152>}Genesis 15:21); and the one as the other were given as an inheritance to Israel, and equally owing to the mercy of God; (see ^{<4051>}Psalm 135:11,12). And thus the heavenly glory, of which Canaan was a type, is an inheritance owing to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, (^{<4012>}Jude 1:21).

Ver. 23. *Who remembered us in our low estate,* etc.] The Israelites; either in Egypt, as Jarchi, when in bondage and distress there, and sent them a deliverer; or in the times of the Judges, whom God raised up one after another, to save his people out of the hands of their enemies, by whom they were oppressed; or in the Babylonian captivity, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi: though the latter thinks their present captivity is rather intended; but as yet they are not remembered in a gracious way and manner. This may be applied to the people of God in a spiritual sense; who, before conversion, are in a low estate through sin, which has brought them into deep poverty, into debt they are not able to discharge, but are liable to a prison; it has stripped them of their original righteousness, instead of which at best they are clothed with filthy rags; it has left them, starving and famishing, to feed on ashes, sensual lusts and pleasures; it has brought them to a dunghill, from whence they are taken as beggars; yea, to a ditch, a pit wherein is in no water; even an horrible pit, the mire and clay of corrupt nature. Man, that was lord of all, is by sin reduced to the utmost slavery to it, and to Satan; and is in the greatest distress and misery; filled with diseases, loathsome and incurable by him; quite lost and undone, helpless, and hopeless, and under the sentence of condemnation and death: but the Lord has remembered his chosen people, and provided a Saviour for them; who has paid all their debts; brought in an everlasting righteousness to clothe them; given his flesh for the life of them; healed all their diseases; delivered them from thralldom and bondage; saved them from condemnation and death, and raised them to sit in heavenly places with him: and not only so, but he sends down his Spirit to convince and convert them, renew and sanctify them; to bring them from death to life; out of darkness into marvellous light; from bondage to liberty; from fellowship with wicked men, into communion with Christ and his people; and to make them meet for heaven and happiness. These are sometimes in a low estate after conversion; when corruptions prevail, and the temptations of Satan are strong; when grace is weak; or God hides his face; or they are grown carnal and secure, lukewarm and indifferent to spiritual things; yet the Lord remembers them again, his lovingkindness, his covenant and promises; and with everlasting kindness has mercy on them, heals their backslidings, and loves them freely (²³¹⁴Hosea 14:4). The Targum is,

“he hath remembered his covenant with us;”

so Kimchi;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; which appears in the mission of his Son to save; in giving his Spirit to regenerate and quicken when dead in sin, and to revive and restore when backslidden.

Ver. 24. *And hath redeemed us from our enemies*, etc.] Temporal enemies, tyrants, and oppressors: and spiritual ones, sin, Satan, the world, the law, death, and hell;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; as is clearly seen in redemption by Jesus Christ, where mercy and truth have met together; and which is a distinguishing mercy to the sons of men, not granted to angels.

Ver. 25. *Who giveth food to all flesh*, etc.] To all creatures; the beasts of the field, and fowls of the air, the young ravens that cry, (^{<39515>}Psalm 145:15,16 147:9). To all men their daily food; to Jews and Gentiles, good men and bad men, (^{<40411>}Matthew 6:11 ^{<4446>}Acts 14:16,17); and spiritual food to all that belong to Christ, who are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone; even himself, the bread of life, the wholesome truths of the Gospel, and its refreshing ordinances;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; he continues to have compassion on his creatures, and opens his hand of providence, and supplies their wants; he is ever mindful of his covenant of grace and mercy, and therefore gives meat to them that fear him, (^{<39115>}Psalm 111:5).

Ver. 26. *O give thanks unto the God of heaven*, etc.] the Maker of it, in which the glory of his wisdom and power is displayed; the possessor of it, where he dwells, has his throne, and keeps his court; from whence all blessings, temporal and spiritual, come and where he has prepared glory and happiness for his people hereafter, a house eternal in the heavens, an inheritance reserved there, a better and a more enduring substance;

for his mercy [endureth] for ever; for though the above character is expressive of his sovereignty and dominion, yet he exercises it in a way of grace and mercy to the sons of men; and therefore they have reason to give thanks unto him and praise him for his kindness and favours shown to them on earth.