

Psalm 136

Psalm 136:1–26

God's Graciousness to Israel in her History

Outline of Chapter 136

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Introduction: We do not know who wrote Psalm 136 or even from what time period it hails. We have a continual verse-by-verse repetition of the phrase **for His grace is everlasting**. This psalm takes us all the way from creation to the exodus from Egypt to Israel east of the Jordan, although argument could be made for vv. 17–18 to apply to the west as well. Therefore, an ideal time to teach this psalm would be at the end of Num. 21. Because of its limited historical breadth, it would not be out of line to suggest that this was even written during the time of Moses. On the other hand, one might assert that David is the author of this psalm, and therefore teach it sometime during the teaching of the book of Samuel. A third viewpoint would be to teach this around Ezra 3:10–11, a time when this (and Psalm 118) were undoubtedly sung in celebration and for inspiration.

Barnes writes: *This psalm also has no title to indicate the author, or to explain the occasion on which it was composed. It is a psalm of very peculiar construction, and stands alone in the form of its poetry. The peculiarity consists in repeating at the close of each verse the language "For his mercy endureth for ever." This is a kind of refrain, and may have been designed, in public worship, to be a response by a choir, or by the people. That is may have been intended to be so used cannot be disproved, nor can any one show that such a response in public worship is, itself, improper or wrong. It is not certain, however, that it was meant to be so used; and it should not, therefore, be appealed to as proving that such responses are proper in public worship, whatever may be true on that point.*¹ In II Chron. 7:6, we get the impression that such a response from the Levites and the priests was a part of worship. And the priests stood at their posts and the Levites, with the instruments of music to Y^ehowah which King David had made for giving praise to Y^ehowah—"For His grace is eternal"—whenever David gave the praise by their hand, while the priests on the other side blew trumpets; and all Israel would stand (II Chron. 2:6). And in the temple, there was a group of Levites specifically to sing and to play music to God (II Chron. 5:11–13).

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¹ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 277.

Introduction

Literally:

**Be caused to give thanks [or praise] to
Y^ehowah because He [is] good; [or, Be
caused to give thanks to Y^ehowah because
this is good,]
because forever [is] His grace**

Psalm
136:1

Smoother English rendering:

**It is good to give thanks and praise to
Jehovah,
because His grace is eternal.**

We begin this verse with the 2nd person masculine plural, Hiphil imperative of yâdâh (הָדַה) [pronounced yaw-DAWH], which has several meanings. ❶ It primarily means *to cast or throw* (Zech. 1:21 Lam. 3:53), a use actually not found too often in the Bible. ❷ In the Qal and the Hiphil, it means *to profess, to confess*. When you throw something, your hand is extended. Gesenius suggests that this looks as though you are pointing at something, so here you are pointing something out (Psalm 32:5). It is either followed by an accusative, as in Psalm 28:13; or by the preposition 'al (לְעַל) [pronounced aI], which means *concerning*. ❸ The primary meaning of yâdâh is *to give thanks, to praise, to celebrate*; since these things naturally follow the acknowledgment or confession of benefits received. It is used in this way and followed by an accusative in Gen. 29:35 49:8 Psalm 7:18; and when followed by the lâmed prefixed preposition, as in Psalm 75:2 I Chron. 29:13 Ezra 3:11. It is used to praise the name of Y^ehowah in I Kings 8:33 Psalm 54:8. ❹ In the Hithpael, it means *to confess, to show oneself as guilty* (Dan. 9:4). It can also mean *to praise, to celebrate* in the Hithpael (II Chron. 30:2). Strong's #3034 (3027) BDB #392. The corresponding noun cognate is tôwdâh (תּוֹדָה) [pronounced toe-DAW], which means *thanksgiving; praise; a giving of praise to; a thanksgiving choir, procession, line, confession*. We will cover this word in great detail in Joshua 7:19. Strong's #8426 BDB #392.

The adjective used to describe God is tōw^bv (טוֹב) [pronounced toe^bv], which means *pleasant, pleasing, agreeable, good*. It is used ❶ to describe that which is *good*; ❷ the goodness and kindness of God (Psalm 65:12); ❸ Goods, wealth (Neh. 5:10); and, ❹ welfare, happiness (Psalm 16:2 106:5). Here it refers to the inherent goodness of God. Strong's #2896 BDB #373. The first line of this psalm is: **Give thanks [or, be caused to give thanks] to Y^ehowah because good.** This is rendered in several different ways by various translators: Give ye thanks to Jehovah, For good, for to the age s His kindness (Young); Give ye thanks to Yahweh For he is good (Rotherham); It is good to give thanks to the LORD, (REB). The latter is probably the closest in meaning, as we do not have a personal pronoun here.

I was surprised as to the varieties of translations of the second line, so, before we exegete this verse, let me give you a taste as to how the various translators handled the refrain:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	...for His mercy and loving-kindness endure for ever;
Barnes (literally)	For unto eternity his mercy.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	For age-abiding is his lovingkindness.
Keil and Delitzsch	For His goodness endureth for ever.
KJV	...for his mercy endureth forever.
NASB	For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
NIV	His love endures forever.
NJB	...for his faithful love endures for ever.
NKJV	...for His mercy endures forever.
Owen's Translation	...for forever his steadfast love.
TEV	...his love is eternal.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	For to the age is His kindness.

The next line begins with the conjunction kîy (כִּי) [pronounced kee], which means *when, that, for, because*. Strong's #3588 BDB #471. This is followed by the lâmed prefixed preposition, which means *to, for*, followed by the masculine singular noun 'ôwlâm (עוֹלָם) [pronounced óo-LAWM], a word indicating *long duration, perpetuity, antiquity, futurity*. With the lâmed preposition it means *forever* (Eccles. 1:4). Strong's #5769 (& #5865) BDB #761.

What follows is the masculine singular of *cheq̄ed* (τορή) [pronounced *KHEH-sed*], which means grace. Strong's #2617 BDB #338. With this we have the 3rd person masculine singular suffix. Our second line is: **because forever His grace.** Very few of us realize just how gracious God is and how gracious He is to us. Our entire soul is in rebellion against Him Who made us and against the God Who sustains us. That is our natural inclination. For those of us who are believers, this is still our natural inclination, even though we will spend eternity in the presence of God. Since God is gracious, and because we will spend eternity with Him, and because He will remain gracious to us forever, then it is good that we praise Him and thank Him.

Barnes: [God's grace and mercy are] ever the same; they never change; they are never exhausted; they are found in all his dealings—in all his acts towards his creatures, and ever will be.² As McGee put it, *The Lord has plenty of mercy. He will never run out of it.*³ As Eph. 2:4 reads: **God is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loves us, even while we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies—in Christ Jesus.** McGee: *I want mercy from God, and He is rich in it. I receive many letters from folks who tell me they have committed some sin. They ask, "Do you think God will forgive me?" Friend, He is rich in mercy. Have you called on Him? If you really want forgiveness, He will give it to you. He deals with us according to His mercy.*⁴

This could be a very popular refrain at the restoration of Israel. We read in Jer. 33:10–11: **Thus says Y^{eh}owah, "Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, 'It is a waste, without man and without beast,' in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, 'Give thanks to Y^{eh}owah of the armies, for Y^{eh}owah is good, because His grace is eternal.'**"

When David had been brought to the city of David, David had quite a celebration. In the midst of I Chron. 16, we have a psalm which could have been composed by David, by Asaph or one of his sons, or it could have been around for awhile. It corresponds in part to Psalm 105 (at least the first 15 verses); however, as a part of this psalm in I Chron. 16:34, we read: **Give thanks to Y^{eh}owah because eternal is His grace.** It is exactly the same as v. 1 of this psalm. In fact, David chose certain men to continue to give thanks to God, as His grace is forever (I Chron. 16:41).

As we have often seen, the first line in a hymn is often used as its title, or at least a quick and dirty way of figuring out where the hymn is. There is the implication that this first line was also taken as its title in II Chron. 20:21–22: **And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to Y^{eh}owah and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said [or, sang?], "Give thanks to Y^{eh}owah, because His grace is eternal."** And when they began singing and praising, Y^{eh}owah set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. My thinking is that song was chosen to be sung on that occasion.

This verse almost replicates Psalm 106:1: **Praise Y^{eh}owah! Give thanks to Y^{eh}owah, for He is good; for His grace is eternal.** The only difference between the two verses is that Psalm 106:1 begins with *Hallelujah*. The similarity of this phrase and the subject material found in Psalms 105, 106 and 136 could indicate the same author and time period (although this is not definite, a strong case could be made for this viewpoint based more upon subject matter than similarity of this one refrain). Both Psalm 107 and Psalm 118 begin similarly; and the material in Psalm 118 could be applied to Israel; however I think the true application is David. The concept of being surrounded by enemies—both in the time of Israel and the life of David—is analogous to our situation in the world. Now, you might think that you get along with everybody and that is a good trait; however, on all sides, if you are growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are surrounded by demons—you have enemies on all sides of you. However, do not fear—they can do nothing to you apart from the permission of God.

² Barnes' Notes, *Psalms Volume 3*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 277. I took some liberties with this quote and went from singular to plural on all of the verbs.

³ J. Vernon McGee; *Psalms chapters 90–150*; Thomas Nelson Publishers; ©1991; p. 140.

⁴ J. Vernon McGee; *Psalms chapters 90–150*; Thomas Nelson Publishers; ©1991; p. 140.

Be caused to give thanks [or, praise] to a God of the gods because forever [is] His grace.

Psalm
136:2

Give praise and thanks to the God of all gods because His grace is eternal.

We have a repetition of the verb, which is followed by the lamed preposition, the construct of the noun we know as Elohim (God) followed by the definite article and elohim again. This is a plural noun (we know that because of the *im* ending); and is properly, in the Hebrew, 'ělōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced *el-o-HEEM*] and this word can refer to the Godhead or to foreign gods. Context inevitably points out whether this is the God, the Creator of the Universe, or foreign gods. Strong's #430 BDB #43. it is by interpretation that we render this first *God* and then *gods*. By interpretation, the first *God* refers to the essence of God—His eternal power, His omniscience, His eternal love and graciousness; to God our Creator, the Creator of the universe. The second use of the word *gods* refers to all angelic creation, including the elect and the fallen angels. We find a similar usage of this word in Psalm 8:5 and 82:1, 6 as well. Their powers and abilities are beyond what we can imagine, except to say that it would be the easiest thing in the world for an angel, elect or fallen, to kick Superman's butt. Over all that is in the universe, there is only one God, our Creator, Who is over all; and it is to Him that we give thanks.

Moses, when speaking to the people, said, “**For Jehovah your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awe-inspiring God Who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.**” (Deut. 10:17). A key issue in the Old Testament is the exclusivity of the God of Israel. “**To you it was shown that you might know that Y^ehowah, He is God—there is none other besides Him...Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Jehovah, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**” (Deut. 4:35, 39). “**Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any Bod besides Me? Or is there any Rock besides Me? I know of none.**” (Isa. 44:8). “**I am Jehovah and there is no other besides Me; there is no other God.**” (Isa. 45:5a; see also Isa. 46:9 Psalm 135:5 Dan. 2:47). We find the same exclusivity in the New Testament: **For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us, there is one God, the Father, from Whom are all things, and we are His; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and we are His.**” (I Cor. 8:5–6). “**And there is no salvation in anyone else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.**” (Acts 4:12). **For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony its own dispensation** (I Tim. 2:5–6).

In Heidenheim's Psalter, this psalm is split into two columns, as he also does with Deut. 32. Although there is no manuscript precedent for this, nor is this the tradition, it readily suits the structure and rhythm of the psalm.⁵

With respect to the refrain, Barnes writes: *The ground of praise here is, that it is a characteristic of the supreme God that he is a merciful Being; that there is blended in his character eternal mercy with infinite power. Mere power might fill us with dread; power mingled with mercy, and able to carry out the purposes of mercy, must lay the foundation for praise.*⁶

Be caused to give thanks [or, praise] to a Lord of the lords because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:3

Give praise and thanks to the Lord of lords because His grace is eternal.

The word for *Lord* here is the masculine plural construct of 'âdôwn (אֲדֹוֹן) [pronounced *aw-DOHN*], the word we often know as *adonai*; and this word means *lord, master, owner, superior, sovereign*. It is a word used of both man and God; and here of God. As a plural, we can either interpret this as referring to the trinity or as an intensification of the noun. In the plural, when applied to man, refers to all of his superiors. Strong's #113 BDB #10. Again, the capitalization and the use of the singular first and then the plural is a matter of interpretation. V. 2, literally, would be *Gods of the gods* and v. 3 would be *Lords [or, sovereigns] of the lords [or, sovereigns]*. We live in a world where

⁵ As per Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. V, p. 797.

⁶ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 277.

there are all kinds of authorities and sovereigns over us; God is sovereign over all. This same phrase is applied to Jesus Christ in I Tim. 6:13–16: **I charge you in the presence of God, Who gives life to all thins, and in the presence of Christ Jesus, Who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He Who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.** And in I Tim. 1:16–17, we read: **And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King, eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God—honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.** And just so we know that we are referring to Jesus Christ, without a doubt: **“These will wage war against the Lamb and the lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are called the chosen and faithful.”** (Rev. 17:14; see also Rev. 19:11–16).

Again, Barnes on the second line: *The ground of praise here, as in the previous verse, is, that this God,—the Supreme Ruler over all the potentates and magistrates of earth,—is a merciful Being. He is kind and benignant towards those rulers, and through them to mankind.*⁷

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God's Majesty and Grace in Creation

To him doing great wonders
because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:4

Give praise and thanks to the One Who does
extraordinary and unusually difficult things
because His grace is eternal.

This verse begins with the lamed preposition and the masculine singular construct, Qal active participle of ‘âsâh (אָשַׁה) [pronounced gaw-SAWH] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. In the Qal active participle, it can mean *a doer, a maker, making, doing*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. This is followed by the feminine plural, Niphal participle of pâlâ' (אֲלָה) [pronounced paw-LAW] which, in the participle, this becomes a substantive (Ex. 3:10 Neh. 9:17 Job 37:14), meaning *that which is extraordinary, that which is extremely difficult to do; wonders, miracles, admirable things*. Strong's #6381 BDB #810.

The first phrase of this verse is somewhat of a summary of what is to follow, both of creation and of God's delivering the Jews out of Egypt. Recall the phrase, *sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic?* God has set up certain laws for this physical universe and what He does even within the confines of those laws is beyond our comprehension. And this is when God chooses to work within the very physical laws that He has ordained (which He does more often than we realize). Since He devised these laws, He is not subject to them. For, **whatever Jehovah pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all the depths** (Psalm 135:6). With reference to creation, we read: **It is He Who made the earth by His power, Who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding, He stretched out the heavens** (Jer. 51:15). With reference to Egypt, Moses said: **“Jehovah showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household.”** (Deut. 6:22). With regards to His works in general, we read in Job: **“Who does great things, unfathomable, and wondrous works without number.”** (Job 9:10). And with regards to creation, Isaiah wrote: **Left up your eyes on high and see Who has created these stars. The One Who leads forth their host by number and He calls them all by name because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power** (Isa. 40:26). In fact, it is in His creation that some men come to know God: **For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse** (Rom. 1:20). **The heavens speak of the glory of God and their expanse declares the work of His hands** (Psalm 19:1).

⁷ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 277. *Benignant* [pronounced bee-NIG-nant] means *kind, gracious*; it is particularly used of superiors toward their inferiors.

Barnes on the second line: *For all these mighty wonders are performed in carrying out purposes of mercy. So the wonders which were done in Egypt were for the deliverance of an oppressed people; so the miracles performed by the Saviour and his apostles were to remove disease and pain, and to establish a religion of mercy; so the Divine interpositions among the nations are to assert the principles of righteousness, to secure the reign of order and love, and to promote the welfare of mankind.*⁸

To Him making the heavens by
understanding
because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:5

Give praise and thanks to the One Who
makes the heavens in understanding
because His grace is eternal.

The next phrase is interesting because it is also the Qal active participle of 'âsâh (הָשַׁע) [pronounced aw-SAWH], but it is not the construct. Therefore, it does not translate to *Him maker of the heavens* but it should be rendered to *Him making the heavens*. The implication is that there is some sort of an ongoing process. This is a tad bit confusing, as God in an instant created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). In six days, He restored the heavens and the earth. The implication is that there is some kind of a continual process which is still occurring which God has set into motion in eternity past. This is followed by the bêyth preposition, which means be (בְּ) [pronounced bê] and it denotes proximity. It is translated *in, among, into, against, with, at, through, by*. Bêyth is used here in its third class use, which may be called the bêyth of accompaniment or of instrument, and is related to the notion of nearness. Here, bêyth may be rendered *with* or *by*. With can denote either instrumentality or accompaniment. No Strong's # BDB #88. It is followed by the feminine singular of t'ebvûnâh (תֵּבוּנָה) [pronounced t'voo-NAWH], which means *understanding*. Strong's #8394 BDB #108. With this verse begins the creation of the universe and its restoration.

What we have here is a summary of the creation of the universe. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 1:1). However, this was not a creation by a simple, mindless explosion. God's creation involved great and manifold wisdom. *Jehovah, by wisdom, founded the earth; by understanding, He established the heavens* (Prov. 3:19). In Proverbs 8, we have a personification of wisdom; the *me* of this chapter refers to wisdom. *Jehovah possessed me at the beginning of His plan, before His works of old. From everlasting, I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; as when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth. When established the heavens, I was there as when He inscribed a ratio on the face of the deep* (Prov. 8:24–27).

Barnes expounds on this second line: *The making of the heavens was a manifestation of mercy and goodness as furnishing an abode for unfallen and holy beings; as a dwelling place for redeemed sinners when they shall be removed there from the earth; and as, by their order, their beauty, their harmony, and their happy influences, tending to promote the happiness of man on earth.*⁹

To the treading down of the earth upon the
waters
because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:6

Give praise and thanks to the One Who
tread down the earth upon the waters
because His grace is eternal.

This verse begins with the masculine singular construct, Qal active participle of râqa' (רָקַע) [pronounced raw-KAH or raw-KAHG], and it means *to beat, to stamp, to beat out, to spread out, to consolidate, to tread down*. Strong's #7554 BDB #955. This is followed by feminine singular *earth* (with a definite article) the preposition *upon, over, against* and followed by the masculine plural of *waters*. This is an interesting use of the verb. It gives the impression that God shaped the land, pounding it out, so that some remained dry and some was trodden down deep enough for waters. Other descriptions are as follows: Gen. 1:9: *Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so.* One of the rarest compounds in the universe is water. The temperature range for water is amazingly narrow. When God took the earth frozen in

⁸ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 278.

⁹ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 278.

ice, the idea of gathering the ice in one place and the land in the other seemed untenable. However, in the liquid state, this makes sense. Psalm 24:1–2: **The earth is Jehovah's and all that it contains; the world and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and He established it upon the rivers.** The picture here is that God made all life dependent upon this water. The basis for all life is the water which supports it. Prov. 3:20: **By His knowledge, the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.** God designed the oceans to be separate and designed the water cycle, absolutely necessary to support life. Isa. 44:24: **Thus says Jehovah, your Redeemer, and the One Who formed you out from the womb, "I, Jehovah, am the Maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone."** God chose to make a place for man to live and to provide for all of man's needs.

**To the Maker of great lights
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:7

**To the One Who made the great lights
because His grace is eternal.**

Here is a phenomenal thing. We all know the *lights* refer to the sun, moon and stars. To us they appear far away and small. However, they are modified by the adjective *gâdôwl* (גָדוֹל) [pronounced *gaw-DOHL*], which means *great* (in magnitude, extent and number). Strong's #1419 BDB #152. Today, because of telescopes and mathematics, we have an idea as to the tremendous magnitude and number of the stars in the heavens; in the Bible, the same is said right here. This verse refers primarily to the sun and moon, which are taken up individually verses which follow.

The related Scripture: Gen. 1:14: **Then God said, "Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth."** And it came to pass. Another related verse is Psalm 74:16: **The day is yours; the night is yours. You have prepared the light and the sun.** Also, James 1:17: **Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.**

Barnes on the second line: *As manifested in all that has followed from the creation an diffusion of light,—(all the beauty in the universe as seen; all the life, beauty, and vigour in the vegetable and animal world; all that there is of life and happiness in the universe—for there could be neither if darkness reigned everywhere); light, the emblem of happiness; the source of joy; the producer, in a great measure, of the beauties of the universe, and the revealer of those beauties everywhere. How can a man think of light and not praise its Author?*¹⁰

**The sun to rule in the day
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:8

**The sun which rules over the day
because His grace is eternal.**

Here we define the great lights. The first is the sun and it is followed by the *lamed* preposition and the feminine singular construct of *mem^eshâlâh* (מֵשָׁלַח) [pronounced *mem^e-shaw-LAW*], which means *ruler, dominion, realm*; in the plural, our best rendering would be *realm*. Strong's #4475 BDB #606. With the *lamed* prefixed preposition, the most common, it may be used to introduce a purpose clause, a result clause, or a temporal clause. I have rendered this noun as though it were the infinitive construct of a verb. We could have rendered this as *the sun to [be] a ruler in the day or the sun to [have] dominion in the day*. Barnes: *That is, to control, as it were, the day; to determine its length—its beginning—its ending—to make it what it is.*¹¹ The Psalmist, given that our focus tends to be upon ourselves, spends but one verse on the earth (v. 6) and several on what we find in the heavens. **And God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night; and the stars. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good** (Gen. 1:16–17).

¹⁰ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 278.

¹¹ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 278.

Barnes on the second line: *By all the blessings of day as distinguished from night and darkness,—by all that the sun in his daily course does to diffuse life, joy, peace, comfort, happiness on the earth,—by all that are warmed by its beams, cheered by its light, guided in labour, guarded from dangers,—do we derive an argument for the mercy of God; by all this there is laid a foundation for his praise.*¹²

The moon and stars to [be] rulers in the
night
because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:9

The moon and stars which rule over the
night
because His grace is eternal.

What you do not see in either this verse or the previous is the untranslated sign of the direct object which precedes them both. This means that they are the direct object of a verb, which would take us back to *the maker of*. We find the feminine plural of the noun *memeshâlâh* (מֵשָׁלַח) [pronounced *memeshaw-LAW*] again. With the plural, we have to re-think the translation. Most translators treated *memeshâlâh* as a verb again, and just rendered this *to rule* as though it were a verb which agreed in number with the subject of the verb. However, *moon and stars* are direct objects of a verb, meaning that they don't also act as subjects. The bottom line is that this is poetry and the author often takes artistic license with Hebrew grammar. That is, we cannot hold the author to the same standards that we hold a writer of narrative to. However, I wanted you to be aware of what was going on here. This second line, as above, also ends with a similar phrase, *in the night*.

Barnes on line two: *by all the beauty of the moon and stars in their course through the heavens,—by all that there is in the harmony and order of their movements,—by all that there is to make night less hideous and fearful,—by all that there is to reveal a countless number of worlds whose existence could not have been discovered but for the night,—by all that there is to guide the mariner on the ocean, enabling him to determine his position and to mark his course when on the deep,—and therefore, by all the blessings of navigation and commerce, binding the different parts of the world together,—by all that there is in the “North-star”, fixed and true in guiding those who flee from bondage,—by all these and kindred things without number, do we see the benignity, the goodness, the mercy of God, in forming the moon and stars “to rule by night.”*¹³ Let me add one tiny addition to the beauty herein named. One of the most enjoyable things for me to do in the spring, summer and fall is the jog along the golf course in the middle of the night during a full moon. It is quiet, peaceful and there is an intense, fragile beauty to a night ruled by moon and stars.

Jeremiah sums up these last few verses: *He Who made the earth by His power; and Who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding, He has stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice, a tumult of waters in the heavens and He causes the vapor clouds to ascend from the end of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain and He brings out the wind from His storehouses* (Jer. 10:12–13).

We have not looked at the sequence of events for a long time. There are several various theories dealing with the creation of the heavens and the earth and they have been dealt with in great detail when we covered Gen. 1. However, let's review them.

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Theories of Creation

- (1) The **Day-Age Theory** teaches that each creative day of Genesis corresponds to a long period of time and that the first chapter of Genesis is more poetic than it is—how should I put this?—accurate. This view is taken mostly by believers who have been taken in by the pervasive teaching of evolution. We are told in very scientific terms that the earth is very old (billions of years old) and man and proto-man have been on this planet for at least a million years; and periodically, that time period gets kicked back. We have several problems here. One is that we have plants and vegetation all existing during a period of time when there

¹² Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 278.

¹³ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; pp. 278–279.

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is no sun. The plants and vegetation occur on day three and the sun on day four. If these ages represent long periods of time, then this reading of Genesis becomes even more useless, as the writer got the order wrong. Now, had Genesis been written by someone moderately familiar with agriculture who spoke of creation poetically, it would be logical that this poet would have mentioned the water and sun first and then the vegetation. What the first chapter of Genesis becomes is something which is very illogical and poorly ordered by the standards of ancient man as well as modern man. Let's approach this from a different standpoint. If you, the writer of Genesis, wanted to get across the idea that we are dealing with literal twenty-four hour days, how exactly would you have re-phrased the first chapter of Genesis so that it could not be interpreted any differently? Do you see the problem? Even if you start talking in terms of twenty-four hours, that still does not eliminate someone taking an *hour* to mean a long block of time in a *creative* day, another long block of time. If you spend too much time dealing with the time element, then you completely lose the focus of this chapter, which is God's creation of our habitat. Now, if you want to hold to this theory until you have had a chance to examine the evidence in favor of special creation as versus evolution, that is not going to necessarily slow your spiritual growth that much. In fact, if you hold to this day-age theory, you might find the debate between creation and evolution quite involving. I've personally read a dozen or so books on the topic and have thoroughly enjoyed being persuaded. In fact, let me recommend *Bones of Contention* by Marvin Lubenow published in 1995 by Baker Books; *Evolution: the fossils Still Say No!* by Duane Gish, published by (I believe) the Institute for Creation Research in 1995; and *Creation Scientists Answer their Critics* by Duane Gish, also published by the Institute for Creation Research in 1993. I also recommend Henry Morris's writings, but with the warning that he believes in the second theory, which I am about to present, which, although that view has its merits (more than the day-age theory), it is still incorrect. His writings reflect this incorrect view; but are nonetheless heartily recommended. Furthermore, in one of his books (I forget which one), he lists roughly fifty different ways the age of the earth is measured, and this is fascinating. Some support his view and some do not. However, it is the most thorough listing of this information anywhere.

- (2) The **Six-Day Creation Theory** is probably the view which most Christians take. God created the heavens and the earth in seven days. Although I am not completely familiar with the Institute for Creation Research, I believe that this is their dominant theory with respect to creation. Gen. 1:1 can be taken as a title or as a thought which would be expanded upon or as part of the first day. **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** Our problem here is with v. 2a: **And the earth was a waste and barren.** In Isa. 45:18, we read: **For thus says Jehovah, Who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it. He established it and did not create it a waste place; He formed it to be inhabited), "I am Jehovah, and there is none else."** Now, this can be interpreted that after the first few days of the creation process, the earth was not a waste or barren. However, that also renders the verse insipid, meaning, why include it in the first place? If you hold to this theory, you will not find yourself spiritually hampered in any way.
- (3) The **Gap Theory (or Restoration Theory)** is the correct view of creation. God, in an instant, created the heavens and the earth. And He did not create the earth as a waste place or as barren, but He had formed it to be inhabited. It was not designed, however, to be inhabited by man—not at first—but by angelic creation. Now, on the following, I am not an expert, but my guess is that the dinosaurs were part and parcel of the earth as originally created. With the fall of Satan, who took with him a third of the angels, God chose to cover the earth in an ice pack. This is v. 2 of Gen. 1: **And the earth was [or, had become] a waste and barren and darkness over faces of deep; and a Spirit of God hovering [or, possibly, brooding] over faces of the waters.** In the Six-Day Creation Theory, when God first created the earth, He created it a waste and barren, and then he improved on that situation. In the Gap Theory, God created the heavens and the earth with the earth not a waste and ready to be inhabited. The packing of the earth in ice was our ice age. It took from the intense beauty of the earth, making it no longer a place that the fallen angels desired to live. The time period between the creation of the heavens and the earth, the earth becoming barren and a waste-place, to the time of the Spirit hovering over the earth, is unknown to us. We do not know the means of light for earth at that time, but I would lean toward God as the light source. This does not mean that there were

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not stars as well; but the primary light source of the planet was God, because He is light. [And God said, let there by light, and so light was. And so God saw the light that it was good, and so He severed \[or, distinguished between\] the light and the darkness](#) (Gen. 1:3–4). The viewpoint of the writer appears to be from the planet earth in v. 3 and possibly hovering above the earth in v. 4. On the earth, it was dark, a waste and barren. The Spirit of God hovered over the frozen earth, warming it, until light from above pierced the desolate darkness. The light source is not given here. Also, notice that God is not said to create or to make a light source here. He calls the light into being. This indicates that the light is coming from God or God is using an already available source. Morris proposes that the earth was covered with a canopy of moisture, which would not be the unlikely result of a sudden warming over the globe. [And God called the light day and the darkness night; and so evening came to pass and morning came to pass—day one](#) (Gen. 1:5). God distinguished or separated light and darkness by naming them. Day one did not actually begin until God called for light to occur. This and the Spirit brooding over the deep caused a sudden temperature rise and we continue with the restoration of the earth on the remaining five days.

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My purpose here was not to exegete the first few verses of Genesis, but to lay a basic foundation for the three different theories prevalent today. And, with this verse, we suddenly leave creation in Gen. 1, and jump to the signs and wonders performed through Moses before the pharaoh of Egypt, culminating in the exodus out of Egypt in Ex. 7–14.

God's Grace in Leading Israel from Egypt to the Land of Promise

[To a Striker of Egypt in their firstborn
because forever is His grace.](#)

Psalm
136:10

[To the One who struck down the first born
of Egypt
because His grace is eternal.](#)

Again, the Hebrew is a little clumsy because this is poetry. We begin with the lamed preposition and the masculine singular construct, Hiphil participle of nākāh (נִקָּה) [pronounced naw-KAWH] which means *smite, assault, hit, strike*. It is not found in the Qal, so the Hiphil does not necessarily carry with it causative action. Strong #5221 BDB #645. Literally, this reads: [To a striker of Egypt in their firstborn](#). It is interesting that we go immediately from God's provision for mankind in general to the striking down of the firstborn of Egypt. This was so God's elect would be delivered. Although God provided every thing necessary for man to live in bliss on this earth, man chose against God. Therefore, man's only hope was to be redeemed by God.

The events which took place are as follows: Moses, as God had instructed him, went to Pharaoh and told Pharaoh to release the Israelites, who had been slaves to Egypt for several hundred years. Pharaoh would refuse, then God would inflict a plague upon Israel by the hand of Moses. The last plague was the death of the firstborn of Egypt. It was a gospel call. In order to avoid death, that night, the family would take some blood of a slain lamb and splash it on both sides of the door frame, and on top of the door frame (so that it would drip down). The result would be the blood would be found in the same four places on the door sill as it was on Jesus Christ when He died for our sins. The blood flowed from His palms, His feet and His head. Those who were under the blood—in the house where the blood had been applied to the door frame—were delivered; that is, their firstborn children were not taken from them by death. This ritual was called the Passover, as death passed over those who were under the blood. Those who were not under the blood lost the firstborn in every family. [Now it came to pass at midnight that Jehovah struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle](#) (Ex. 12:29; see also Psalm 78:51–135:8). The final judgment, which brought release to the Israelites, was foretold long before it occurred. [And Jehovah said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then you will say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says](#)

Jehovah, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I said to you, 'Let My son God, that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Observe, I will kill your sons, your firstborn.'" (Ex. 4:21–23). Ex. 6–10 dealt with the various plagues and Ex. 11–13 deals with the Passover.

Barnes: *It was in mercy to his people. It was the means of their deliverance from bondage, for the Egyptians would not otherwise have suffered them to depart. By all the results of their deliverance, both to themselves and to mankind, the act was seen to be an act of mercy to the world. It was better for mankind that the Hebrews should be delivered even at this sacrifice than it would have been that they should not be brought into the promised land.*¹⁴ Although we have covered this before and will cover this in great detail in the book of Joshua, no one dies in God's plan by some fluke or accident. First of all, all men die; and secondly, all men have the chance to be saved. It was probably clearer to the Egyptian people than any other group of heathen people. And certainly, some did believe and some went with Israel. However, the miracles which were brought about at the hand of Moses were invasive and every person in Egypt observed their results first hand. The waters were turned to blood; the entire land was infested with frogs and locusts and all manner of insect. Everyone was touched by the boils and the hail. These were not miracles which took place with a small audience of royal Egyptians. Every Egyptian observed them and this gave every Egyptian the opportunity to be saved. When Passover instructions were given, there was nothing said about this being confined to Jews only. Any person, regardless of race or nationality, could participate in Passover. After seeing a half dozen plagues come to pass at the hand of Moses, the Egyptian people had no excuse. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes [i.e., His essence], His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For in fact when they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, nor did they give thanks, but they received worthless thoughts in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools* (Rom. 1:18–22).

Outline of the End of Psalm 136

This third portion of the psalm may be further subdivided as follows:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| vv. 10–15 | God delivers Israel out from the midst of Egypt |
| v. 16 | God leads His people in the wilderness |
| vv. 17–20 | God guides Israel to conquer the great kings east of the Jordan |
| vv. 21–22 | God gives the land of Canaan to Israel as His gracious gift |

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**And so He brought out Israel from their
midst
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:11

**And so He removed Israel from among them
because His grace is eternal.**

This verse begins with the wâw consecutive and the 3rd person masculine singular Hiphil imperfect of yâtsâ' (יָצָא) [pronounced yaw-TZAWH], which means *to go out, to come out, to come forth*; however, in this context it occasionally means *to revert*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to go out, to lead out, to bring out*. Strong's #3318 BDB #422. The noun which follows is *Israel*, which, most of the time would be taken as the subject of the verb, as it matches the verb in its morphology. However, Israel did not cause something to go out of Egypt—God caused them to go out of Egypt. Hence, the subject is *He*. Scripture says: [And it came to pass on that same day that Jehovah brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies](#) (Ex. 12:51). And the Jewish people were firmly admonished to keep this incident in their memory. [Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery, for by a powerful hand, Jehovah brought you out from](#)

¹⁴ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 279.

this place." (Ex. 13:3a). This exodus was also foretold: "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretch arm and with great judgments.' " (Ex. 6:6).

**By a hand of strength and by an arm
stretched out
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:12

**By His strong hand and His stretch out arm
because His grace is eternal.**

This verse begins with the bêyth preposition, which is used in its instrumental form. *Arm* is followed by the feminine singular Qal passive participle of nâtâh (נָתַח) [pronounced *naw-TAWH*], which means *to stretch out, to spread out, to extend*. Strong's #5186 BDB #639. Here it functions as an adjective.

This is a very general description of God's aide to Israel. Moses used this verbiage when reminding Israel that what happened to them was unique in all of history. "Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within a nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as Jehovah your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (Deut. 4:34). In fact, Moses used this expression on several occasions (Deut. 5:15 7:19 9:29 11:2). Moses first heard this expression from God, but separately. Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh; for by a strong hand, he will let them go and by a strong hand, he will drive them out of his land...Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm with great judgments.'" (Ex. 6:1, 6). The phrase *strong hand* refers to God's omnipotence and a *stretched out arm* refers to God's grace and His taking an active role in history. To His enemies, the stretched out arm denotes His power executed in judgment.

We have two groups of people who have become quite confused over this. Historically, our founding fathers were peppered with deists; that is, those who believed that God created the world but is now indifferent to it. Some felt that was God's general attitude since creation; others, who believed in the portion of the Bible they read (from Genesis, through Exodus, and a few chapters of Leviticus), thought that God at one time took an active part in man's affairs but no longer has an interest in what we do. That is, it is up to us to take it from there. The other distortion is that of the holy rollers, respectively referred to as charismatics. They have deluded themselves into seeing God's visible, active hand in terms of visible signs and wonders occurring today. Their church service is a three-ring circus where God's miracles are performed and people are slain in the Spirit, people are healed, and people speak in tongues. Mostly, it is the latter which occurs. Thieme referred to them as being on a drunk. They begin to sober up throughout the week, and then they go back for more. They do not observe any divine involvement. At best, they are psychologically engaged and at worst, they experience demon activity. They seem to have no grasp of the fact that Jesus would mere touch people who were hopeless cases in the realm of health and even His most critical witnesses did not dispute the miracles, but debated whether they were proper or not. A present-day healer worth his salt today would march into any ICU with members of his congregation and touch those who have no hope to reveal God's power. However, they know full well that their touching will do nothing for these people, except expose them for the frauds that they are.

You may wonder—how can these *brothers* of ours in Christ be doing such great works—that is, vigorous and active church services and great evangelism—and yet be so confused? It is easy. Listen carefully to their gospel message. Rarely if ever do you hear a charismatic teach that salvation comes merely from placing one's trust in Christ. They will encourage you to ask Christ into your heart or life; they will tell you to dedicate your life to Him; they will tell you to believe and to dedicate your life; they will tell you to come forward; they will tell you to repent of your sins. They will tell you to do just about anything except to simply believe in Jesus Christ. I knew a charismatic who fancied herself a charismatic to the stars of Hollywood. When I question her thoroughly, she did not use the words of the Bible. When she said it was just a matter of semantics, I pointed out that the Bible never used the phrases that she used and always used different verbiage. I told her if there is any question at all, then you go with what the Bible says, not that that made any difference. Furthermore, once these charismatics get their hands on you, then they teach you that you can lose your salvation. In other words, they teach salvation by works and they teach that salvation is maintained or sustained by human works. You might go into a Baptist church unsaved and

attend that Baptist church for a long time. However, at some point in time, you will hear the gospel clearly presented (I am speaking in theory here, not in reality, because there are some Baptist ministers who do not have a clue). However, given the doctrines of the charismatics, you can attend their churches for a lifetime and never hear the gospel clearly presented. In fact, once you get their doctrine that your salvation can be lost, you cannot hold to that doctrine as an unsaved person and become saved. If you can lose your salvation, that means that there is something you can do to lose it. That means there is something you can do to retain it. There is nothing that we can do for our salvation. To us, our salvation is 100% free and without strings. If we desire a relationship with God, it can be ours in a few seconds and that relationship will last for all eternity, apart from any initial or sustaining work on our part. All we need to do is to believe in Jesus Christ and we are saved, completely and eternally. Whether our life then reflects Jesus Christ is another and different matter which has nothing to do with our salvation. That is, we cannot maintain, sustain, retain or lose our salvation by some subsequent action on our part. Holding to that is a thinly veiled salvation by works.

In case you were unaware, Satan is in the religion business. In fact, Satan is much more actively involved in religion than he is in the pornography industry; in terrorism; in warfare. Satan desires to delude us. If we are going to go to church then Satan wants to be certain that it is going to be a church which keeps us from the gospel of God. The Catholic church and the many varieties of charismatic churches are examples of this. I have known many Catholics and many charismatics and they are often very dedicated to their faith and staunch in their defense of same. I have dated many Catholics, who, even though their lives do not reflect the teachings of their church, adhere to and support the teachings of their religion. Charismatics are often equally persistent if not more so. In fact, now would be a good time to examine the **Doctrine of the Similarities of Catholics and Charismatics—not finished yet!!**

Now, if we are going to be saved, then Satan wants to make certain that we are neutralized as believers in Jesus Christ. He wants to be certain that the Bible is not taught; or, if it is taught, then it is taught poorly and without scholarly rigor. This is why you can go into churches with a fairly accurate presentation of the gospel and here very little decent Bible teaching. It is the teaching of the Word of God which gives us spiritual growth.

To a Divider of a sea of rushes to parts
because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:13

Praise and thanks giving to the One Who
divided the Reed Sea
because His grace is eternal.

After the lamed preposition we have the masculine singular construct, Qal active participle of gâzar (גָּזַר) [pronounced gaw-ZAHR], and this means *to cut, to divide, to decree*. Strong's #1504 BDB #160. Here it means a *divider of*. What is divided is *the sea of reeds*. What follows is the lamed preposition and the masculine plural of the noun cognate gezer (גֵּזֶר) [pronounced GEH-zer], which means *pieces, parts*. It is only found here and in Gen. 15:17. Strong's #1506 BDB #160.

After the great signs and wonders performed at the hand of Moses, which culminated in the death of the firstborn, Moses led the people out of Egypt. However, they were pursued by Pharaoh and when they came to the Sea of Reeds, they were trapped between the sea and Pharaoh's forces. Israel could not be in a more helpless situation. At that time, Israel was wholly unprepared in the field of warfare and Pharaoh's forces had been specifically trained in the art of warfare. The men of Israel were terrifically scared. Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the desert? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert. Then Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the deliverance of Jehovah which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. Jehovah will fight for you while you keep silent." And the angel of God, Who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, so that it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was a cloud along with darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one who did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah swept the sea by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.

And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left (Ex. 14:13–14, 19–22). Obviously, a miracle like this was recounted many times. Psalm 78:13: **He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap.**

And He caused Israel to pass in their midst because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:14

And He had Israel pass through the midst of the Red Sea because His grace is eternal.

Their midst refers to the two portions of the Sea of Reeds. The verb is the 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil perfect of 'âbvar (אָבַר) [pronounced aw^b-VAHR], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716. This construction of the verb and sentence is exactly like that in v. 11. **Thus, He rebuked the Sea of Reeds and it dried up; and He led them through the deeps, as through the wilderness** (Psalm 106:9). Barnes: *His mercy and grace were manifested by keeping the waves from returning on them and overwhelming them.*¹⁵

And He shook off Pharaoh and his army in a Sea of Reeds because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:15

And He destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Sea of Reeds because His grace is eternal.

We have the Piel perfect of nâ 'ar (נָאַר) [pronounced naw-GAHR], which means *to shake, to shake out, to shake off*. The picture here is to get a locust caught in your hair and you shake your head and it falls out. With some translations, you would have no idea that this is what the verb means. The KJV, NRSV and Owens render this *overthrew*, as does the NASB (which footnotes the correct rendering); the NIV, REB and NAB render this *swept* (which isn't bad); and the NJB renders this *drowned*. Strong's #5287 BDB #654. Pharaoh is a minor pest that God shakes out of the hair of Israel. **Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. And it came to pass at the morning watch, that Jehovah looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for Jehovah is fighting for them against the Egyptians."** Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then Jehovah shook off the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the water returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus Jehovah delivered Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And when Israel saw the great power which Jehovah had used against the Egyptians, the people feared Jehovah and they believed in Jehovah and in His servant Moses (Ex. 14:23–31).

Barnes on God's grace and mercy: *The death of a wicked man is a benefit to the world, and the act of removing him may be really an act of the highest benevolence to mankind. No wrong is done to such men, for they deserve to die; and the only service which can be rendered to the world through them is by their removal from the earth.*¹⁶ This is no different than removing a homicidal maniac from this earth, or a common criminal killer. This is a blessing to the world as a whole, and justice to the victim's family.

To a Leader of His people in the wilderness because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:16

To the One leading His people through the wilderness because His grace is eternal.

¹⁵ Paraphrased from Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 279.

¹⁶ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 280.

As we have found throughout much of this chapter, this first verb is a Hiphil participle; the verb is the very common **hâlak^e** (הַלָּק) [pronounced *haw-LAHK^e*], which means *to go, to come, to depart, to walk*. The Hiphil is the causative stem. Young renders this *to Him leading*, Rotherham *to Him that led*; KJV, *to Him which led*; Owen, the NIV and the NASB, *to him who led*. Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229. This verse takes in half the book of Exodus, all of Leviticus and all of Numbers. Recall that what the reader is being exhorted to do is to give thanks and praise to the Leader of His people. Hence, God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds; and the sons of Israel went up orderly in rows of five from the land of Egypt. Then Moses led Israel from the Sea of Reeds and they went out into the wilderness of Shur (Ex. 13:18 15:22a). Moses reminded the people, "He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water. He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness, He fed you manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end (Duet. 8:15–16). But He led forth His own people like sheep and He guided them in the wilderness like a flock (Psalm 78:15).

God led out of Egypt two million former slaves, the bulk of which were lesser believers (they apparently were all believers). God provided them with manna in the desert; He saw to it that they had water. God performed big, unquestionable works of grace to sustain them, that all of Israel could observe what God did for them. We like to think that if we saw things like this, our faith would be made stronger; that we could really believe God and really therefore lead lives which honor Him. Poppycock. God used this generation to prove to us that men could see daily miracles and still be failures as believers. For those who were negative toward the gospel in the first place—the Egyptians, for instance—they observed tremendous signs and wonders as they had never seen before. They knew that it was Jehovah, the God of Israel, Who delivered Israel. Yet most of them did not believe. We saw the same set of circumstances during the time our Lord walked on this earth. The men around Him saw tremendous miracles. Still, some believed and some did not. Most of his disciples were great failures while He was on this earth. Out of eleven believers, only the Apostle John actually stayed at the foot of the cross. Not coincidentally, it is the gospel of John which reveals more doctrine than the other books and presents more of the divine perspective than do the other gospels.¹⁷

**To a Striker of great kings
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:17

**To the One Who struck down the great kings
because His grace is eternal.**

The great kings referred to here are not the kings of northern and southern Palestine, as this psalm is going in a chronological order. These are the great kings on the east side of the Jordan who refused to allow Israel to pass through unharmed. In fact, referring to them as *great kings* is very apropos. These were kings who actually ruled over a kingdom of a huge plot of land and several cities. The kings of the book of Joshua ruled over a city or sometimes a city and its outlying villages. They were not unlike a cross between the toughest soldier of that area and a mayor—at the time of this writing, Governor of Minnesota, Jesse Ventura, is probably a closest modern-day example of the kings of the era in general. Psalm 135:10–11 read: *And He struck down many nations and he executed many kings. Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan; and all of the kingdoms of Canaan.* What will follow in the next few verses are the specific examples.

**And so He executed majestic kings
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:18

**So then Jehovah killed the majestic kings
because His grace is eternal.**

The verb is the Qal imperfect of **hârag** (הָרָג) [pronounced *haw-RAHG*] means *to kill, to slay, and, occasionally, to execute* (Ex. 32:27 Lev. 20:15–16 Deut. 13:10). Strong's #2026 BDB #246. The adjective which modifies *kings* is the masculine plural of **'addiyr** (אֲדִיר) [pronounced *ahd-DEER*], which means *majestic*. That's the short version. According to Gesenius, this means ❶ *large, very great, mighty* (Psalm 93:4 Isa. 33:21); ❷ *powerful* when used of kings and kingdoms (I Sam. 4:8 Psalm 136:18 Ezek. 32:18); ❸ *prince, leader, chief, noble* (when used

¹⁷ Matthew carefully presents Jesus as the Messiah, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Mark presents a brief history of our Lord, as he was not there. He likely recorded this from what Peter taught him. Luke, a great historian and the only Gentile writer of Scripture, used the other gospels and the information which he received firsthand from the other disciples, and put together a careful, chronological history of our Lord's ministry.

as a substantive); ④ *magnificent, illustrious, glorious* (Psalm 8:2); and, ⑤ *noble* (when applied in a moral sense, as in Psalm 16:3). Strong's #117 BDB #12. The writer of this psalm will now become specific as to whom he is referring.

With reference to Sihon, king of the Amorites because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:19

Including Sihon, the king of the Amorites because His grace is eternal.

This verse begins, like most of them, with the lamed preposition, which also can mean *with reference to*. In this verse and the next, the psalmist is going to be specific as to which great kings God defeated. The term *Amorites* is often applied as a general term to the enemies of Israel simply because these were the first people that Israel encountered in the wilderness who presented themselves as hostile to Israel. It is a general terms which also means *westerner*. They occupied the land which was the northern border of Moab, half way up the Dead Sea and bordered on the west by the Dead Sea. Ammon was their eastern border and north of them was Gilead. The Amorites had recently taken this land from Moab (Num. 21:46). All of their land went to Reuben and Gad.

The historical account is found in Num. 21:21–32: *Then Israel had sent out messengers to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, saying, “Let me pass through your land. We will not turn off into field or vineyard; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the king’s highway until we have passed through your border.”* But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his border. So Sihon gathered all his people and they went out against Israel in the wilderness and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. Then Israel struck him down with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon was Jazer. And Israel took all these cities and Israel lived in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all her villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon. Therefore, those who use proverbs say, “Come to Heshbon! Let it be built! So let the city of Sihon be established. For a fire went forth from Heshbon, a flame from the town of Sihon. It devoured Ar of Moab, the dominant heights of the Arnon. Woe to you, O Moab! You are ruined, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons as fugitives and his daughters into captivity to the Amorite king, Sihon. But we have cast them down. Heshbon is ruined as far as Dibon. Then we laid waste even to Nophah, which reaches to Medeba.” Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites. And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its villages and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

And with reference to Og, king of Bashan because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:20

As well as Og, the king of Bashan because His grace is eternal.

This verse also begins with the lamed prefixed preposition, meaning *with reference to*. The historical account is found in Num. 21:33–35: *Then they turned and went up by the way of Bashan and Og the king of Bashan went out with his people, for battle at Edrei. But Jehovah said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people and his land; and you will do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.”* So they killed him and his sons and all his people, until there was no remnant left him; and they possessed his land.

And He gave their land as an inheritance [or, possession] because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:21

God gave to Israel their land as an inheritance because His grace is eternal.

God would have allowed Israel to pass through these lands without attacking the population. However, the kings, Og and Bashan, would not allow that. What is occurring here is that God did not require Israel to destroy the entire populations of the kingdoms of Og and Bashan, as many of these people were positive toward God. However, a majority of the population was negative, as was its leadership; and it was those who were killed. The defeat of Sihon and Og is recounted many times in Scripture, both by Moses in Deut. 29:7 “When you reached this place,

Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, came out to meet us for battle, but we defeated them; and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh" (see also Deut. 2:26–3:17 for the long version); and by the author(s) of Psalms 135 and 136.

You may question as to why I would teach this immediately after Num. 21 when these verses seem to speak to the giving of the Land of Promise over to Israel, a process which begins in the book of Joshua. However, the promise of this land goes all the way back to Gen. 13:14–17: *And Y^ehowah said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then you descendants could also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you."* Since this has been a promise for thousands of years, it would not be out of place for an author of the time period of the book of Numbers to include these two verses, even though the Israelites had not stepped foot across the Jordan River.

**A possession for Israel, His servant
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:22

**Their kingdoms the inheritance of Israel,
Jehovah's servant
because His grace is eternal.**

The first word of this verse is the feminine singular noun nachălāh (נַחֲלָה) [pronounced *nah-khuh-LAW*], which means *possession, property, inheritance*. Strong's #5159 BDB #635. The *possession or inheritance* spoken of here refers to the kingdoms of Og and Bashan. Israel is called the servant of God in this verse. Israel went from being under bondage to Egypt (called the house of *bondage*—which is the same word as we find here translated *servant*).to being the servant of God. We experience a similar change in station when we believe in Jesus Christ; we go from being in bondage to sin to being servants of God. After salvation, our life is a constant change between serving God and serving unrighteousness. *Don't you know that when you place yourselves under orders to someone, slaves for obedience, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedience from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed and you have been freed from sin, and you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking from human viewpoint because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were excluded in regard to righteousness. Therefore, what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are no w ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus out Lord (Rom. 6:16–23). Flee immorality. Every sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, Whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body (I Cor. 6:18–20).*

Barnes: *The idea in the whole passage, in view of the Divine interposition in slaying the mighty kings, and in giving their land for a possession to the Hebrew people, is, that it was a proof of mercy and benevolence. It is benevolence to mankind and to the church of God,—it is in the interests of humanity, of domestic peace, and of the charities of life, to remove wicked men from the world. This mercy many be manifested further, not merely in removing the wicked, but in transferring their possessions to those who will make a better sue of them. Thus the possessions of these mighty kings, Sihon and Og, were transferred to the people of God, and lands which had been devoted to the service of blood, ambition, crime, pollution, and idolatry, became devoted to the service of religion and righteousness. In like manner, through the removal of a wicked man from the world by death, God may cause his wealth, accumulated by avarice and dishonesty, to be transferred to the hands of children who will make a good use of it—children converted as if in anticipation of this, and with a view to this. Among the highest expressions*

of mercy to the world may be, therefore, the removal of wicked princes in war,—or the removal of wicked men, in other ranks of life, by death in any form.¹⁸

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God's Grace in Providing for us

Who in our lowliness, remembered us because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:23

Who thought of us, despite our lowly state because His grace is eternal.

In this verse, we have the masculine singular of shéphel (שָׁפֵל) [pronounced SHAY-fe], which means a *low state, lowliness, a low condition*. It is only found here and in Eccles. 10:6. Strong's #8216 BDB #1050. God made great promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's son, Joseph enjoyed great prosperity in the land of Egypt. And so he brought his family there to be under his protection and provision. Then we have a gap of nearly 400 years and when we next check in on Israel, she has been placed in bondage to Egypt. Now it came to pass in those many days that the king of Egypt died and the sons of Israel signed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice (Ex. 2:23–25). Nevertheless, He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry. And He remembered His covenant for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His grace. He also made them objects of His compassion in the presence of all their captors (Psalm 106:44–46).

Lest there be any confusion, God did not choose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and then get really busy with some other pressing issues, and suddenly, 400 years later, cry out, "Holy crap! I forgot all about those guys!" The term *remember* is an anthropopathism; it is the ascribing of a characteristic to God which He does not actually have, with the intent of better explaining His actions. God never forgot Israel and God never removed His eyes¹⁹ from Israel; it just appeared that way from the human standpoint.

And so He separated us from our foes because forever is His grace.

Psalm
136:24

And He rescued us from our foes because His grace is eternal.

The verb is the 3rd person masculine singular, 1st person plural suffix, Qal imperfect of phâraq (פְּרַקֵּת) [pronounced paw-RAHK], which means *to tear apart, to tear away, to separate*; it is often used in the sense of *rescue, redeem*. Strong's #6561 BDB #830.

The prepositional phrase begins with *from* and the masculine plural (with a 1st person plural suffix) of tsar (צָרָא) [pronounced tsahr], and this verb has three sets of meanings: ❶ *an adversary, an enemy* (except for Num. 10:9, it is found used this way only in poetry—Job 16:9 Deut. 32:27 Psalm 81:15 Lam 1:7 Isa. 9:10—and in the later writings—Esther 7:4 Neh. 9:27; generally in the plural without a definite article). ❷ It also means *distress, affliction* (Psalm 18:7 66:14 106:44 102:3—generally in the singular with a definite article). ❸ A *stone* (Isa. 5:28). These correspond to the slightly different meanings of its verb cognate. BDB lists these under two separate headings, with a third for the adjective. Strong's #6862 BDB #865.

This verse is both a specific statement referring to God taking Israel out of Egypt and separating her from her enemies; as well as a general statement to Israel and a general statement for us. "And I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and, I said to you, "I am Jehovah your God; you will not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live." (Judges 6:9–10a). Our lives will be filled with enemies—and this is not something that we choose. However, God will deliver us. There are times we must endure them and often they are fellow believers, but God

¹⁸ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 280.

¹⁹ This is an anthropomorphism.

will deliver us. Now and again, you may want to stop and check yourself—have you become the enemy of a believer in Jesus Christ? Have you become a thorn in their side? Have your personal prejudices become such that you now harass a fellow believer? Or have you behaved in a manner which is not befitting of a child of God? Have you not honored your word? Have you broken a contract? Have you lied or misrepresented yourself? God often uses believers to test other believers. Is God using you while in a carnal state to test someone else? If you're being tested and not disciplined, this is a good thing. **For blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved by our Lord, he will receive the crown of life, which has been promised to those who love Him** (James 1:12). However, if you are the one who, in carnality, are doing the testing, then we have Psalm 44:7: **But You have delivered us from our adversaries, and You have put to shame those who hate us.**

**The Giver of bread to all flesh
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:25

**He gives bread to all flesh
because His grace is eternal.**

The masculine noun is lechem (לֶחֶם) [pronounced *LEH-khem*], which means *bread* literally. However, it often has the wider application of being translated *food*. Strong's #3899 BDB #536.

Who God gives sustenance to is the masculine singular of bâsâr (בָּשָׂר) [pronounced *baw-SAWR*], which means *flesh*, referring to that which is more than just the epidermis of the body. Here it is used to refer to *living things* (as in Gen. 6:17, 19 Lev. 17:14). Strong's #1320 BDB #142. **Then God said, "Observe, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it will be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given green plants for food."** (Gen. 1:30). **"For this reason, I say to you, do not be anxious for your life as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"** (Matt. 6:25–26).

Israel enjoyed a particular relationship with God; but it was not a relationship which excluded people of other nations. The God of Israel is the God of the Universe—there is no other. It is not a stretch for a believer from another nation to recognize that such a God has provided for him as well. This verse indicates that the God of Israel provides the basic necessities for all mankind then we can conclude He provides their eternal deliverance as well.

**Be caused to give thanks [or praise] to God
of [two] heavens
because forever is His grace.**

Psalm
136:26

**Give thanks to the God of the heavens
because His grace is eternal.**

We conclude the psalm with a refrain similar to that used in the first three verses.

Barnes: *The general idea [of this Psalm] is, that all these acts of the Divine interposition,—all that God has done, even though it seemed to be a display of power or of justice, or severity or of wrath,—was, in fact, an illustration of the "mercy" [or, grace] of God, and laid a foundation for praise. That is, All this was connected with the good of his people, with favours to mankind, with the accomplishment of great and benevolent purposes, and, therefore, was expressive of mercy,—a proof that the "mercy of God endures for ever."*²⁰

In commenting on the previous verse, I used the name *the God of the Universe*. This is precisely what is meant by *the God of the Heavens*. We find this used often by the Persians (Ezra 1:2 Neh. 1:4, 5 2:4, 20) and pre-Israel (Gen. 24:3, 7), but not exclusively so (Deut. 4:39 Joshua 2:11 Eccles. 5:2).

²⁰ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 277.

Let's let Barnes take us out, as how many expositors have a comment on the second line for every verse? *In view of all this—of all that he does in heaven and on earth—let praise be ascribed to him. To know the measure of the praise due to him; to see how great is his “mercy,” it would be necessary to know all that he does in heaven and on earth. That will not be known here. It will constitute the theme of contemplation and praise for ever and ever. Enough, however, is known here to show the propriety of repeating again, again, and again, as in this psalm, the language, “For his mercy endureth for ever;” “For his mercy endureth for ever;” “For his mercy endureth for ever.”*²¹

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²¹ Barnes' Notes, Psalms Volume 3, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 281.