

# PSALM 136

- <sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good, for God's steadfast love endures for ever.  
<sup>2</sup> O give thanks to the God of gods, for God's steadfast love endures for ever.  
<sup>3</sup> O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>4</sup> who alone does great wonders, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>5</sup> who by understanding made the heavens, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>6</sup> who spread out the earth on the waters, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>7</sup> who made the great lights, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>8</sup> the sun to rule over the day, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>9</sup> the moon and stars to rule over the night, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>10</sup> who struck Egypt through their firstborn, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>11</sup> and brought Israel out from among them, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>12</sup> with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>13</sup> who divided the Red Sea in two, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>14</sup> and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>15</sup> but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>16</sup> who led the people through the wilderness, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>17</sup> who struck down great kings, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>18</sup> and killed famous kings, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>19</sup> Sihon, king of the Amorites, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>20</sup> and Og, king of Bashan, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>21</sup> and gave their land as a heritage, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>22</sup> a heritage to God's servant Israel, for God's steadfast love endures for ever.  
<sup>23</sup> It is the mighty One who remembered us in our low estate, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>24</sup> and rescued us from our foes, for God's steadfast love endures for ever;  
<sup>25</sup> who gives food to all flesh, for God's steadfast love endures for ever.  
<sup>26</sup> O give thanks to the God of heaven, for God's steadfast love endures for ever.

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If there was a title to this call and response psalm/hymn, what would it be? "For God's steadfast love endures for ever!" This phrase is repeated 26 times, and each time it is a response to a phrase telling something about God's wonderful creation, and then, ongoing deliverance of the people in difficult times. It concludes with the gift of land given to the people even when they had to fight to claim it. The way the story is told in this psalm is very similar to Psalm 135.

But this psalm also expands the story and inserts the repeated phrase about God's love enduring for ever. Can you imagine how powerful it is for people to come together, and

regardless of their differences, feel totally united around a common history and a common identity? Can you imagine how powerful it is to be singing these words with a worship leader leading and then everyone repeating the same phrase again and again raising the volume each time until it becomes a shout? What a way to build fullness in togetherness! What a way to expand faith, hope and love for God and each other!

But once again, pondering this psalm like we did 135, is there a better way to tell the story? Is there a way to tell it where God doesn't have to be made the author of the murder of infants or even of enemies? Is there a better way of telling the story of entry into the promised land in a way where it doesn't have to mean those already inhabiting the land are pushed out?

I believe there is. If Jesus were telling the story of his people's deliverance from slavery all the way through their journey into the promised land, the focus would be on the gift of faith and hope that they can be free, faith and hope the power of resilience and determination in making an incredibly difficult journey with few guarantees of any final outcome. It would also be about conflict as self-defence and the reluctant use of force to defend and protect the defenceless. It would be about finding a place to call home as refugees fleeing persecution and enslavement, and therefore seeking new partnerships in a new land with the people who already inhabit it. God would be the steadfast love energizing the people with strength of purpose and integrity of heart.

But can you see how many Europeans reading psalms like this would have interpreted them as they came to turtle Island (North America)? Reading a biblical passage outside its context is too easy as is forgetting that the Hebrews were not colonialists in search of enslaving and destroying other peoples and taking over their lands. They were themselves oppressed people in search of a place of safety and abundance to call home. They wanted to be free from oppression and they wanted to be able to thank the God who was on their side as downtrodden people. At their best, when faith drove them rather than fear, they sought out partnerships and reconciliation with other peoples where possible.

Is this our God too, or are we more desirous of a God who will give us everything we want regardless of how it affects the welfare of others and mother earth herself? What reasons do we give thanks and praise to God? Psalm 136 is an invitation to give thanks and praise for "God's steadfast love endures for ever." The reasons we give and the ways we tell our story, however, reveal how we see God working and how God in Jesus would work for us. Unless love is rising up in us, both strong and tender, it may not be this God who is the inspiration.

How do you tell your stories of deliverance? How is God in them? How may you praise and thank God?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for deliverance in our times of trouble. Thank you for those times faith wins over fear in us and love overcomes hate and mistrust. Thank you for blessing us even when we are not at our best. Grant us faith and hope in your love even as we pass through difficult times when we cannot see a positive way forward. In Jesus' name; Amen.