



[Psalms 136-138](#)

Psalm 136-138
Tape #7213
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Psalm one hundred and thirty-six. This psalm is one of those, which are known as an antiphonal psalm that is it was to be sung back and forth. The priests, it was thought, took the first part and then the congregation would answer the second part; that is "for his mercy endureth forever". It would go in a sort of a rhythmic kind of a way in which in their gathering, in their worship to God, it would be back and forth. Let's give it a shot tonight before we analyze the psalm let's go ahead and read it through and I'll act like I am the priest. I'll read the first part and you answer in unison "for his mercy endureth forever". You'll get then the idea of how this was used in the worship by the Hebrews.

Now what truth do you suppose was impressed in their heart by the time they finished that psalm? Yet, what truth of scripture are we more prone to doubt? How many times has Satan come to you declaring that you've gone too far, that you went over the boundary, that God isn't interested in trying to help you anymore, that God's given up on you, that you expended the mercy of God and that God's mercy is no longer available for you? Yet the truth that God wants to implant deep and indelibly within our hearts is that "his mercy endureth forever". All you have to do is call upon the Lord. His mercy is available for you. It really doesn't matter what the sin may be, how serious your refraction or how great your rebellion. If you will turn to God and ask his forgiveness you will discover that his mercy endureth forever.

O GIVE thanks unto the LORD: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:1).

Notice the word Lord is in all capitals which means that it is that name for God by which he revealed himself to the Jews, the YAWEH or the Jehovah. Then the second name for God the Elohim but he is called the God of gods.

O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:2).

The recognition in the Bible that there are many gods that people worshiped. There are sensual type of gods where a person would make godlike his sensuality or his emotions or some power in the universe. The God of gods or the God who is above all gods.

Before his death, Francis Schaffer was saying that the time has come when you just can't refer to God because there are so many gods that have really invaded our western culture.

We are looking into doing a video series of the pagan invasion of the west and show how our western culture has been invaded by paganism. Tremendous invasion of witchcraft from England, the occult from Europe, and invasion of the eastern mysticisms from India and how our western world has been invaded by paganism. You'd be shocked at how deep the penetration has been. Satanism, this pagan invasion of the United States has been invaded by paganism.

So Francis Schaffer says you just can't say God anymore because god means so many things to so many people. This is as a result of mysticism and the invasion of Hinduism. When you say God a person may be thinking of a beautiful rose or a lovely waterfall or a quiet forest. So he said, "we need to more or less define the God that we are talking about when we make reference to God". He said, "We should say the true eternal living God in order to define the God that we are speaking about" because god means so many things to so many people and it's just an essence or atmosphere. You have to then define that you are talking about the eternal living creator of the universe, the God of gods.

The third Hebrew word that is described to him is Lord, capital L small ord. This is the Hebrew word, *Adoni*. Adoni is a title of lordship. It is the equivalent of the Greek word for lordship.

O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:3).

He is the Lord of lords and of course that's one of the titles that is given to Jesus in the book of Revelation, King over the kings and Lord over lords.

In the first three verses are the three names of God in the Old Testament. Then the praising of God or the acknowledging of God in his creative acts.

To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:4-6).

That is He caused the dry land to appear.

To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:7-9).

So for his created acts they are recognized. The God who created these things is the God whose mercy endures forever. That's the longevity of the mercy of God, it endures forever, but what about the depth of the mercy of God? How much will it cover? We have another psalm that declares for "As the heavens are high above the earth so high is his mercy towards those that fear him".

The science of astronomy has been advancing rapidly with the advent of new telescopes and new ways of probing into the universe. It used to be that we would set the telescopes on the mountain tops that were the furthest away from air pollution but unfortunately air pollution is becoming sort of a world wide problem. So now they are setting telescopes in rockets in orbit around the earth. These telescopes are able to probe the skies without the distortion of our atmosphere and get some good clean pictures.

It is interesting and I do believe that it is all guess work, I mean how can you tell between twelve billion light years and thirteen billion light years? That's a pretty tough measurement to make, thus we have a lot of theories. It's interesting that with the development of these new telescopes a lot of the old theories are being cast aside. They say, "Well, we were wrong in that. We discovered that what we believe is no longer provable" thus theories have changed. Then they say, "Because we are able to change that means we are true scientists so what we teach is true because we are able to change it when we discover that changes need to be made". In reality, it's a lot of theory.

The theory of the red shift and all this is theory, no one can actually go out there to measure the speed as to which the star is traveling and how fast it is moving away from us. Some of the latest guesses are now fifteen billion light years. They raised it actually from this past summer. It went from twelve billion to fifteen billion light years. The universe expanded by three billion light years over the last three years. It's exciting to realize how vast the universe is because the more they discover, the higher and greater God's mercy is towards me. When I feel man, I must be at the limit then they discover it's another three billion light years further out and I breathe a sigh of relief and say, "Alright I can go for a while longer, it will cover for a little more". God's mercy endures forever and is as high as the heavens.

Now, turning from the creative acts of God and the extolling of God's mercy, the God who is the creator, he is also the God who established the nation of Israel for his purposes.

To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever: To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him

which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever: And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth forever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever: And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:10-25).

God feeds the animal kingdom.

O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever (136:26).

The repeated truth for emphasis that it might be implanted deep in our hearts and deep in our minds and never, never, never should we question whether or not God will be merciful to forgive us our sins or our transgressions. His mercy endures forever, his mercy is without limit and his mercy will cover you.

Psalms one hundred and thirty-seven is a psalm of captivity. When Israel was carried away as a captive to Babylon, slaves, as they left Jerusalem there was a horrible scene. The city was on fire, the enemy troops were breaking down the walls, they had destroyed the temple, they were crashing down the walls of the houses setting the whole thing on fire. The Edomites who were the perennial enemies of Judah were there encouraging the Babylonian soldiers. They were crying out, "Raise it, raise it! Wipe it out!" There last scene as they are being driven in chains bound and taking captive to Babylon, there last scene of Jerusalem was a bitter scene. Many of their children had been dashed in the streets by the Babylonians, the women with child were ripped up. It was a horrible, bloody mess. Those that did survive, they only picked those that were fit. They killed off the rest and those that they felt would make good slaves, those that were fittest, they put in chains to take them away to Babylon as slaves and they were captive.

BY the rivers of Babylon, (137:1).

That would be the Euphrates River that ran through the heart of Babylon.

BY the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion (137:1).

Thinking back to that horrible scene of bloodshed and destruction.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof (137:2).

That I think is where the Weeping Willow got its name, the sitting by the rivers weeping in Babylon hanging their hearts there on willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth [party], saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion (137:3).

They wanted them to sing one of the psalms that David had written. For the most part the Israeli music is upbeat, up tempo. They have their dances and it's exciting music, it's always an exciting time to be around a bunch of Israelis when they start singing their folk songs. It's just good upbeat exciting music. They are great singers and they have some fabulous songs. One of the highlights of our tours, when we all get together and the bus drivers and the guides start singing some of the Israeli songs and we have an evening of festivities with their singing of their Israeli songs. They're just good upbeat tempos and great songs. So there in Babylon they say to sing some songs, let's have a happy party. Here is their response.

How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? (137:4).

How can we sing praises to God under these conditions, the Lord's song here in this strange land? Then the declaration.

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning (137:5).

That is the cunning skillful playing of the harp, let my right hand forget how to play on the harp cunningly if I would forget Jerusalem. I don't want to sing, if I would forget what I saw in Jerusalem, that terrible bloodshed, if I forget that then let my right hand forget it's cunning. I don't want to sing about it.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; (137:6).

I want don't want to sing. Just let my tongue get stuck at the top of my mouth making me incapable of singing.

if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy (137:6).

Jerusalem was and is a city that is the chief joy of so many devout Jews. There are those Jews that are living in Jerusalem today who feel that they are the most fortunate blessed people on the face of the earth for the privilege of being able to live in Jerusalem. There's a charm about the city that is sort of unexplainable. It's interesting how that so many times when we go on tour to Israel, as we come into sight where we round the bend and there we have Jerusalem before us, there is just something about it that the whole bus load of people break out weeping. There is something about that city that's like no other city in the world.

Those truly devout Jews feel that those Jews who live in Tel Aviv are almost atheist living outside of Jerusalem and being content in Tel Aviv. They feel that it is almost blasphemy. Every true Jew will not be content until he is living in Jerusalem itself. This love for Jerusalem, this deep devotion goes way back even to Biblical times.

There in Babylon remembering Jerusalem and the horrible things that transpired there, they prayed to God for vengeance. We probably, in this Christian era, find it rather difficult to understand their prayer because they really want God to take vengeance upon those that destroyed them.

Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; (137:7).

That is in the day in which Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof (137:7).

Remember that Lord, that is, Lord take care of them.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; (137:8).

Their prophets have predicted that Babylon would be God's instrument of judgement and that they would fall to Babylon. This is basically the message that Jeremiah was repeating to them. It was the message by which Jeremiah got into trouble. He was thrown into prison accused being a traitor because he was saying, "Don't try to defend yourself against Babylon; God has given Jerusalem over to Babylon. Surrender and save the city". The false prophets were saying, "No, we're going to drive Babylon off and they'll never take Jerusalem". They accused Jeremiah of being in league with the Babylonians trying to demoralize the people from defending the city and he was accused of being a traitor and he was put in the dungeon. Jeremiah also prophesied against Babylonian. One day God would bring his judgement upon Babylon. Other prophets, Isaiah and all, prophesied the judgement against Babylon. So the one who wrote the psalm knew that Babylon was to be destroyed.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones (137:8-9).

Even as the Babylonians had dashed the little children of Israel against the stones so those that destroy you. That desire to see the vengeance against the Babylonians.

The one hundred and thirty-eighth psalm begins with praise.

I WILL praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee (138:1).

The word God, Elohim, was used of the judges, of the princes, of the rulers of the land. In the book of Exodus when God gave the instructions for the judges he called them the Elohim, the gods, the rulers and the princes of the land. Thus before the gods it is thought that it was making reference to the princes, the nobles, the judges of the land.

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness (138:2).

Another word for mercy.

and for thy truth: (138:2).

Praising God for lovingkindness and truth.

for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name (138:2).

The name of God, the Yahweh or Jehovah, was held in such high reverence by the Jews. They would not pronounce the name of God. They felt that it was too holy to cross the lips of mortal man. That is why we don't know how to pronounce it. In writing their text in only had the consonants of YHWH. There were no vowels placed so it leaves it unpronounceable. How in the world would you pronounce YHWH? Without vowels it remains unpronounceable. They did that deliberately because they didn't want a person even in their mind pronouncing the name of God. When you read the text they didn't want you in your mind to even pronounce that name. So sacred did they hold the name of God.

So sacred did they hold the name of God that when the scribes would be copying the text and they came to the place in the text where they were to write the consonants YHWH to represent the name of God, they would go through a ritual of sorts. They would go in and take a bath, put on fresh clothes, get a new pen, dip it in fresh ink and then write the letters YHWH. That's how high they held in reverence the name of God. You can imagine the blasphemy they felt of a person would take the name of the Lord in vain. In order to keep a person from doing that they left the pronunciation of his name to die so no one could really know how to pronounce God's name.

They held the name of God in highest reverence. It was something that to the Jew was the most sacred word, too sacred for a man to pronounce or even in his own mind to think of it. Thus, when reading the text and they come to the YHWH, rather than trying to pronounce the name they would just say "the name". "The name" became synonymous with the name of God, the creator of the universe. Never any endeavor to pronounce his name. Here the psalmist declares that he has magnified his word above his name. The name of God was magnified above everything else as far as the Jew was concerned but here that God has magnified his word above his name.

We have the word of God. God has revealed himself to man. The Bible is God's revelation of himself to man and God has honored his word. He magnified his word even above his name. What a blessing it is for us to be able to study the word of God and thus learn about God and learn about the character and nature of God. Here in the text, what does it teach us concerning God? I will praise thy name, the name of God, for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth.

In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

An immediate answer to the prayer, in that same day you answered me and strengthened me.

All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great is the glory of the LORD (138:4-5).

This extolling of God and the extolling of the word of God, the kings of the earth praising the Lord when they hear the words of thy mouth, singing in the ways of the Lord for great is the glory of the Lord.

Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off (138:6).

It is interesting that the scripture extols as a great virtue humbleness and looks upon as a great evil and a great sin pride. It is interesting that the world seems to honor the opposite, the world seems to extol the man that is proud. They look up and almost worship that man that is proud. They sort of look with disdain upon the humble person. It is interesting the characteristics that God respects and admires and compare them with the characteristics that the natural man respects and admires.

To be proud is to be blind to the truth. To be proud is a sign that a person really hasn't had yet a true vision of God the creator. God is so high, God is so great, that to really come into a real consciousness of God the eternal creator of the universe, he is so vast and so great that to come into a true awareness or consciousness of him just is probably the most humbling thing that any man can experience. No man can walk away from the presence of God with any sense of pride or haughtiness in himself.

Isaiah the prophet in chapter six of his book talked about king Uzziah who was one of the popular kings in Israel. He had a long and prosperous reign. He was a good king for the most part. He, in his latter years, intruded into the priestly office, a place that he didn't belong and was severely punished for it. The people all trusted in Uzziah because the nation had so prospered under his rule. He was a strong leader and people had confidence in him. As long as Uzziah is sitting on the throne we are safe, we're strong. When Uzziah died it created a shaking among the people because his strong leadership and ability left them in a kind of a desperation. The Bible tells us that the name of Uzziah was on the lips of all the people, his name was spread abroad.

Sometimes when you get a leader that is strong and popular that leader can become a detriment to the people because the people begin to look to that leader and trust in the leader rather than looking to God and trusting in God. So many times God has to remove that leader in order to get the peoples eyes back on him. Thus was the case with Uzziah. Isaiah said, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up, sitting on the throne and his glory did fill the temple". Everyone was saying the throne is empty, Uzziah is dead. What are we going to do? Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord sitting on the throne" it's not empty. God is sitting on the throne. He is high and lifted up, his glory filled the temple. Isaiah said, "Then said I," in seeing God he saw himself, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips". Seeing God he saw himself and what he saw wasn't good. For he saw himself now in the light of God.

Our mistake, as Jesus points out, "You do error in that you compare yourself with each other". So when you start looking around that standard of comparison "I know I'm not that good looking but I'm better looking then they are or I'm smarter than he is". We always choose someone dumber than us to compare ourselves with because it makes us look better. We are prone to make these comparisons of one another.

The Lord says that we are using the wrong standards. "I know I'm not very righteous but I'm better than he is". In comparing ourselves with each other we are making a mistake because I'm not the standard for righteousness. Jesus Christ is the standard for righteousness. You look at me and you can feel pretty good about yourself. "Chuck pastors a church and look, he gets angry and upset on the freeway when someone cuts him off". You feel pretty good about yourself but I'm not the standard. I'm just like you; feet of clay. Jesus Christ is the standard and when you start holding up that standard then "woe is me". All these messages of pride go.

The Lord has a way of dealing with prideful people. God has a way of dealing with them and bringing them down. The Bible says, "Pride goeth before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall". If your heart gets lifted up with pride God has his means of bringing you down to size. The Bible tells us "Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up". God exalted the meek but he abases the proud. Here the humble are the people that he is interested in. God has not chosen many of the great people of the earth, many of the wise and mighty but he has chosen the simple, the common people. If you are just a simple

common person than you're the kind that he chooses. If you are very outstanding and mister citizen of the century and president of the United States then you've got a hard road to hoe as far as the Lord is concerned.

Peter, when he saw the Lord said, "Depart from me Lord, I'm a sinful man". When he saw God's work he realized who Jesus was and he said to depart because he's a sinful man. Daniel had his vision of the Lord and he said, "Then that beauty that was in me turned to ugliness". I saw myself now in the light of God, in the standard of God and all of that pride that I might have had in what I accomplished or who I was goes when I stand there in the presence of God. He has respect for the lowly but the proud he knows afar off. The proud are not close to him at all.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: (138:7).

God will preserve me. Even in the midst of trouble, the Lord is going to be the one who keeps me going.

thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, (138:7).

God will be my defense. It's glorious to have God defending you, keeping you.

and thy right hand shall save me (138:7).

The right hand was always considered the hand of strength, God's hand upon my life.

The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: (138:8).

The Lord is going to complete that work that he started in your life. "Having begun a good work in you, he shall continue to perform it unto that day." God never starts something he doesn't intend to finish. The Bible says, "He is the author and the finisher of our faith". If you have come to a faith in Jesus Christ it is because the Lord has planted that faith in your heart. He has called you, you are one of his chosen. He has put that faith in your heart. "For by grace are you saved through faith" and that's not of yourself it is a gift of God. God gave you that gift of faith to believe in Jesus Christ. He was the author of that faith, he was the one that planted that faith there, he was the one that by his spirit drew you to himself and convicted you of your sin and made you aware of your need of a saviour and brought you to Jesus Christ and then planted the faith in your heart to believe for salvation is of the Lord.

Having begun that good work, having planted that faith in your heart, he's not only the author but he's the finisher. Here's where a lot of people get confused in a way. They say, "Pray that the Lord will just help me to hold on till the end" this endurance type of thing, this marathon. Have you seen the start of the Boston Marathon? Thousands of people start the Boston Marathon every year and some of them only go two blocks and then they wear the T-shirt "I ran in the Boston Marathon". They go around everywhere wearing this T-shirts so proud they ran in this marathon for two whole blocks. Thousands of people start that race and not too many finish. If you go to the finish line and watch for those who finish but not many finish although thousands start the race.

In this race of eternal life are many people that start. They start of their own. They start many times with no intention of finishing. Things are exciting, things are happening, let's go jump in. They are like the seed that's planted on the stony ground, it may come up quickly but there is no root, there's no foundation underneath. When troubles come the house built on the sand, it collapses. It's a genuine work of God planting that faith in your heart to believe in Jesus Christ. "The Lord, having begun that work, he is going to continue to perform it for he's not only the author but the finisher of your faith". You don't have to worry about hanging on or enduring to the end. He will perfect or complete that which concerns you.

The word perfect unfortunately means something different to us today then when the translated the Bible. You talk about being perfect you think of no flaws and you think of something that is absolutely pure. In the Bible the word meant complete. It was just a completeness. The Lord is going to complete his work that he began in you.

thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: (138:8).

Yes Lord, I think I got the message.

Then the prayer of David to close this psalm.

forsake not the works of thine own hands (138:8).

God has taken my salvation as a personal work of God. He is molding me and forming me into the image of Jesus Christ. That is God's purpose for your life, that we might be conformed to his image by the power of his spirit working in us. The prayer of the psalmist is Lord, don't forsake the work of your hands. You are his handiwork, his workmanship created in Christ Jesus to the good works that God has before ordained that you should walk in them. This is a glorious promise, the Lord will complete his work but he ends it with a prayer of Lord, don't forsake the work of your hands.

Father we thank You again for that work of the Holy Spirit within our lives, as You Lord mold and shape us, as Your Spirit is conforming us into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord. How thankful we are Lord that we stand before you righteous in Him because your mercy endures forever. We thank You Lord that You do not impute our sins against us but Your mercy endures forever. Lord we thank You for that mercy, Your lovingkindness and Your grace towards us in Christ Jesus. Help us Lord always to remember that it's not by our works of righteousness but by Your grace are we saved. Through the mercy we have been forgiven and we praise You, world without end. Amen.

May He bless and watch over you during the week. May you be strengthened in your walk with Jesus Christ. When you blow it and Satan comes along and starts to accuse and condemn just remember his mercy endures forever.