

From Pastor's Desk

The Great Hallel

The Jewish Rabbis call Psalms 136 "The Great Hallel". If 'bless', opens and closes the Psalm 135, "give thanks", opens and closes the Psalm 136. This is an antiphonal psalm designed for public worship. This psalm is composed of 26 verses and structured with three main topics:

1. Yahweh Himself is characterized (136:1-9)
2. Yahweh's acts of deliverance are highlighted (136:10-22)
3. Israel is called to praise their God, the only God (136:23-26)

The Priest would pronounce the first line of each verse and the worshippers the second in refrain.

"Give Thanks" is basically used of thanksgiving by singing liturgical phrase or confessing the attributes and acts of God. "For He is God" describes Yahweh's quality as a person. "For His loving kindness is everlasting" is a recurrent affirmation of Yahweh's mercy and eternity and the same is repeated in every verse. The term "loving kindness" (*hesed*) is theologically analogous to the NT 'agape'.

The first strophe of the Psalm describes the Yahweh's person and acts of creation.

1. He is good (v.1)
2. He is over all gods (vs.2-3)
3. He is the creator of this planet (vs.4-9)

The Psalmist identifies four things in relation to Yahweh as the creator in the first part of this Psalm (136:1-9)

1. Yahweh who alone does great wonders (v.4)
2. Yahweh who made the heavens with skill (v.5)
3. Yahweh who spread out the earth above the waters (v.6)
4. Yahweh who made the great lights (vs.7-9)

The focus is on giving thanks to God (worship) for who He is and what He has done for His people.

"The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the creator." (Louis Pasteur, Medicine)

God bless you.

Rev. K. M. Varughese
(Senior Pastor, IPC Hebron, Los Angeles)

Jehovah's Mercy Endures Forever

Rosamma Varughese, Ladies Coordinator

We do not know who wrote Psalms 136, but we do know that it was sung in Solomon's temple (2Ch 7:3-6), and by the armies of Jehoshaphat when they sang themselves into victory in the wilderness of Tekoa. It is also known to be a very popular hymn among the Lord's ancient people. It was frequently sung at the Passover, and today, we mostly read this Psalm on Thanksgiving Days.

According to Charles Spurgeon, if God's goodness never ceases, then our praises should endure forever, and our thanksgiving should never be silent. Therefore, our thanksgiving should not be limited to just special occasions. Eph 5:20 says, "always give thanks" and 1Thess 5:18 says "in everything giving thanks."

In verses 4-9 we see God's wonderful creation. The Word says, "By wisdom, God made heaven and earth." His admirable wisdom exceeds the capacity of all the creatures of this world! The heaven displays the love of God to man and the earth teaches the duty of man to God says Gen 1:6, Psalm 24:2 Isaiah 42:5, Isaiah 44:24 and Jeremiah 10:12.

Furthermore, it is striking when the Psalmist emphasizes, "God's loving kindness is everlasting" about 26 times in the same Psalm. It is because the enemy wants us to doubt the truth.

Moreover, the Bible mentions about numerous women who gave thanks to the Lord. Sarah, Rachel, Ruth, Esther, and there was also a prophet, Anna (the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher) who never left the temple but worshipped and gave thanks night and day, fasting and praying. Therefore, Sisters in Christ let us follow the examples of these great women of faith in giving all the glory and the honor to God for Jehovah's mercy endures forever.

Prayer: A Powerful Tool

Bejoy Mathew, Prayer Coordinator

As this month's theme states, God created this earth just as easily as we drape a bed sheet over our bed. Who can stand against a God like that and who can change his plan? (Isaiah 14:27) The answer is a praying person

In Exodus 32:10 and Genesis 32:26, we read that God was not able to leave because a man held on to Him. A mere man, a weakling made up of sand was able to stop God in his tracks. How is that even possible? It is because of his pleading prayer to Him that caused Him to stop. Yes, here we see that a prayer can be such a powerful tool, so powerful that it can stop God in His tracks. Furthermore, prayers are so powerful that it comes with a greater responsibility. This great responsibility is to learn how to use this tool effectively and for the good of others.

To pray effectively, we need to build a relationship with God and we can do that only if we pray as often as possible. If we analyze the last few prayers we made, do we pray mostly for ourselves than we pray for others? Apostle Paul was a model of a prayer person. If you look at all his prayers mentioned in the Bible, he mostly prayed for others all the time. We need to be on our knees pleading with God for our church members, our friends, our family members, our cities, our states and our countries. If we do this sincerely and consistently, we will be able to make the most powerful entity in this universe to listen and to act for us.