

Then and Now

God's Steadfast Love Forever

Psalm 136:1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁵ to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁶ to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁷ to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁸ the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁹ the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹² with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁴ and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁵ but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures forever;
¹⁶ to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever;
¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever;
¹⁸ and killed mighty kings, for his steadfast love endures forever;
¹⁹ Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁰ and Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures forever;
²¹ and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures forever;
²² a heritage to Israel his servant, for his steadfast love endures forever.
²³ It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁴ and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁵ he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever.
²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Psalms 136

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

MONDAY AUGUST 2, 1993. It was a glorious, cool sunny morning high up in the San Juan mountains at a place called Chicago Basin. I had driven into Denver from Minnesota on an all-nighter with a friend to attend the first well-known

Promise Keepers event in Boulder. 50,000 men gathered that Friday evening and all-day Saturday to hear preaching, be encouraged as men, and sing Christian songs. It was unlike anything I (or anyone else) had ever experienced before. You don't know what living is until that many men line up outside of a stadium and begin to spontaneously sing Amazing Grace while they wait patiently for their food in lines 10 people across and as deep as the eye can see. The song began at one end of the line and made its way slowly down with everyone happily singing and listening to the echo that could be heard after the verse passed. It was like something out of a dream.

While it was a memorable weekend, my trip to Colorado was not finished. I was living in Minneapolis at the time, and so my goal of climbing all of Colorado's 14,000ft. mountains had to be done in chunks, whenever I could find a way to get back out here. This was a good excuse to extend my trip.

We decided upon a difficult-to-get-to three set of peaks that are close enough together to climb in a single day—if you are strong enough. But to do it, we had to drive another seven hours and then hop on the Narrow-Gauge Railroad

and get off at the half-way point between Durango and Silverton, hike another 7 miles to basecamp, pitch a tent, and get up early in the morning and start.

That day began almost immediately with the only abandoned church structure I've ever seen in the big hills at the foot of a mountain. This was followed shortly thereafter by the first mountain goat most of us had seen on a peak (we hadn't climbed those where they normally are spotted).



By the time we were nearing the top, I was thinking, “What chapter of the Bible would fit a weekend like this?” I always read a chapter from the Bible when I get to the top of a 14er. After several hours, when we arrived on the summit of the

14,088 ft. Windom Peak, I broke out my little black NKJV Bible that I always carried with me and I gave the following instructions to my five other mates, one of whom was my brother.

“O.K. guys. Right after I bellow out the first line, you are going to respond by loudly chanting in unison, ‘... for his steadfast love endures forever.’ We have to do this right; it is a one-time deal. So even though there are only six of us, the echo off the mountains might just give the one we just heard in that food line a run for its money.” With that, I began to read from Psalm 136:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,

He is good

He is good

He is good

for his steadfast love endures forever.

forever

forever

forever

Give thanks to the God of gods,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords,

for his steadfast love endures forever ...

We continued this for all twenty-six verses. Then we all shouted ‘Amen!’ which was heard at least five seconds later as the word leapt off the steep canyons walls of the massif. We said a few prayers and ate some food in preparation for the second of two more mountains we had to climb before descending the next morning out of that basin, back to the train, and for me, the 30 hours ride back to Minnesota where I had to be back at work on Wednesday. Thus ended for me one of the great Hallelujah weeks of my entire life.

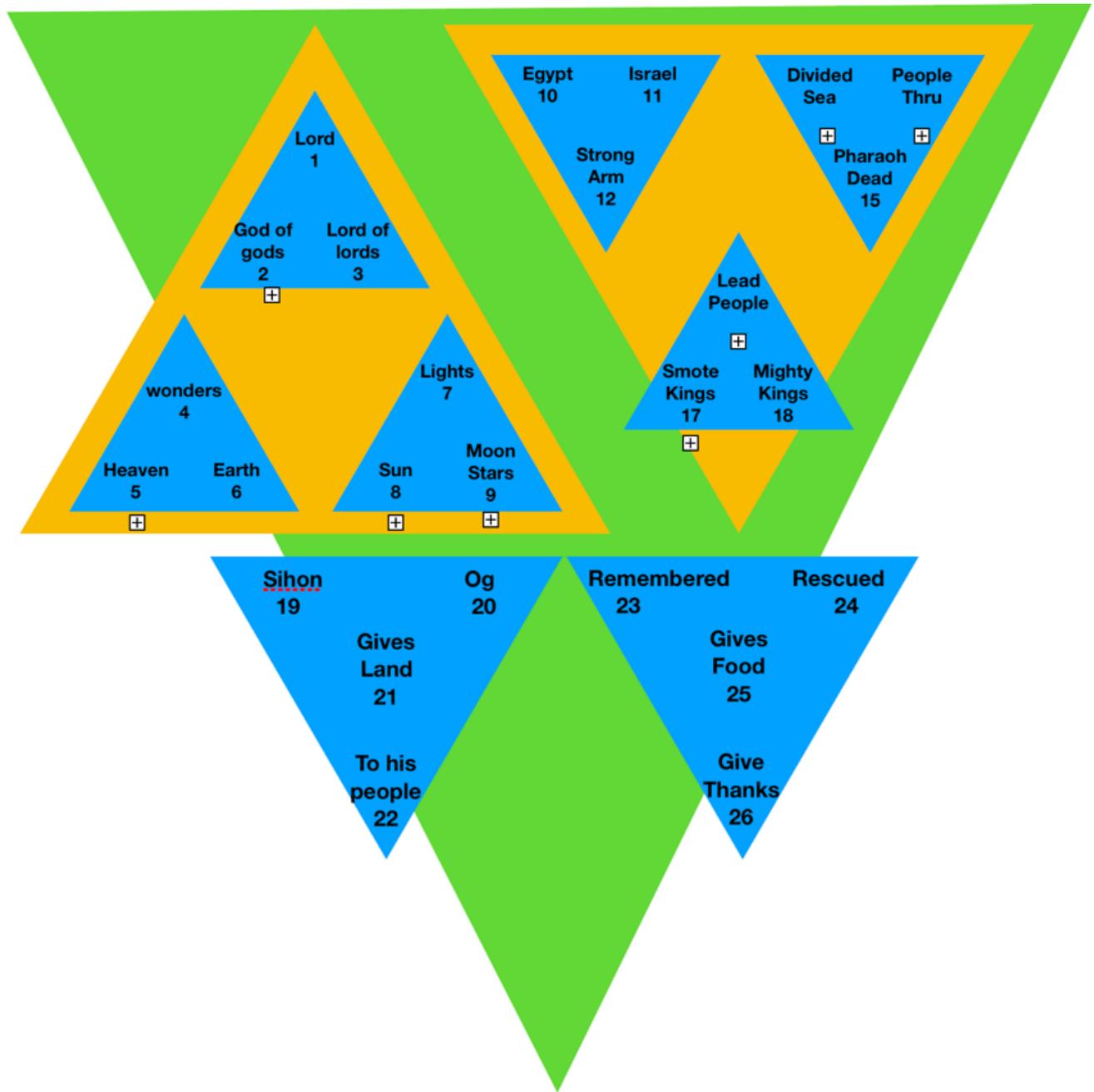
The Great Hallel

Introduction

Psalm 136 is unique in the Bible in that it is a song that states a single act of God and then repeats it with a refrain, doing this some 26 times in a row. Though there are many songs with refrains, there’s really nothing else like this. Its structure is a complex series of layered triangles¹ (see below), pairings of triads which help you remember the themes,

¹ The figure below is adapted from [Jacob Bazak](#), “The Geometric-Figurative Structure of Psalm cxxxvi,” *VetTest* 35 [1985]: 129–38). It is an explanation of the structure of Psalm 136, as we will see.

which are also three: creation (vv. 1-10), redemption (vv. 11-22), present help (vv. 23-26).²



² Most subdivide these up a little, but I think it is the general idea.

Now, before we get into the song, it is important to know that it is a [twin psalm of Psalm 135](#). It has many of the same themes, including the same general order of events and even some of the more obscure specifics like kings Og and Sihon. They were clearly sung in liturgies together, with the former being more of a historical recap put to song and this one being more of an historical recap put to a special form called a litany.

A [litany](#) is a liturgical series of repetitions, sometimes as requests, other times as praise, which the worship leader and the people do as a [call and response](#). The most famous of these in the OT is when half the tribes would gather on a mountain called Ebal and the other half on a mountain next to it called Gerizim and they would yell back and forth the promises and curses of the covenant (see Dt 27:12ff). The repetition here is “[his steadfast love endures forever.](#)” “Steadfast” is the familiar word *hesed*, and it refers to [God’s unbreakable, unconditional covenant love](#), rooted in his promises and sworn to him by an oath to Abraham. This love is proven in these 26 ways throughout a song that, probably because of its massive repetition, came to be known as [The Great Hallel](#).

The Rabbis have a tradition that Psalm 136 was sung “at the fourth cup after concluding the Hallel Psalms (Ps 113-118)” and just before singing “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps 23).³ They even tried to guess as to why it has 26 verses (as their alphabet is only 22 letters, unlike our 26). “[Q.] What comprises the great Hallel?” [A.] Said R. Joshua b. Levi, ‘The twenty-six references to ‘praise’ ... correspond to the twenty-six generations that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the world, to whom he did not give the Torah; he sustained them by his love since they had no merit of their own.’⁴ This is interesting to me because it means that even they did not see the song as only having reference to Israel. No. God’s goodness and steadfast love extends to all in one way or another. This means it has particular relevance all these centuries later.

When you combine these ideas: Passover and the songs sung there, a litany, the refrain, the fact that it is about creation and redemption, that it is for Jews and Gentiles, and so many other things, it becomes a kind of **paradigm for how**

³ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 679.

⁴ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 679.

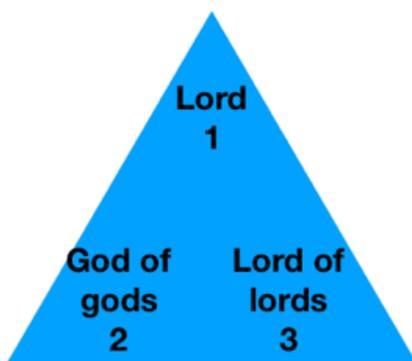
to give praise to God. How do you do that? You think of things and thank him; you list off things and tell one another of his loving-kindness through it; you remember things God has done and you apply it to the present because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so with that, let's look at the song.

God of Creation (vv. 1-10)

As I said, there is much repetition between this and the last song, so it behooves us to approach the content from a different perspective than we did in Psalm 135. The repetition begins immediately. The unknown author says, “Give thanks to the LORD for he is good.” This is a repetition of 135:3, “Praise the LORD, for he is good; sing to his Name, for it is pleasant.” The difference? Praising is a specific way of giving thanks. It is through song. This, too, is a song; but here it will praise specifically by remembering many things about God and affirming his *hesed* love through it all.

The word “LORD” here is **Yahweh** (Gk: *Kurios*)—the covenant name. This is followed by two more words for

God: **Elohim** (vs. 2; Gk *Theos*) and **Adonai** (3; Gk Kurios again). This forms the first of three triads, perfect for a Triune God—Yahweh Elohim Adonai.



In the verses, **Yahweh is compared to other beings**, just as he is in the previous song. Previously he was “**Lord above all gods**” (135:5). Here he is “**the God of gods**” (136:2). This is parallel with him being “**Lord of lords**” (3). Clearly, the first reference is to heavenly beings. As Michael Heiser often points out, this is a comparison, but it is **a comparison that only makes sense if both entities are real**. What would be the point of comparing God to, say, Mickey Mouse or Ms. Butterworth? Not only would that be absurd, it would be close to blasphemy as it could only be considered a mockery of the God of the Universe. Of COURSE God is greater than Mickey Mouse! Does that even need to be said, let

alone sung publicly and recorded in inspired Scripture? The gods (*elohim*) to which it refers are **the heavenly beings** that are seen throughout the Psalter and the rest of the Bible, which in the NT are called thrones, powers, principalities, dominions, stars, authorities, princes, and so on. God is greater than any of these. Now *that* means something!

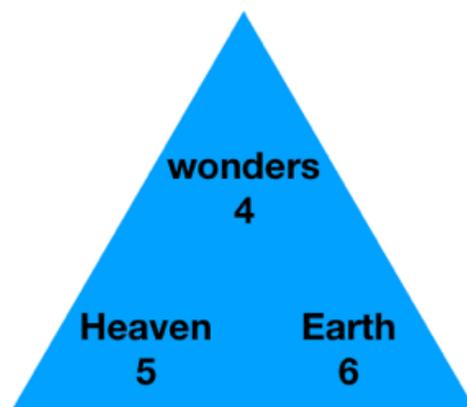
The second title, I believe, is parallel, but not identical. Though angelic beings are sometimes called lords (**1Co 8:5**), it is probably better to see these lords as their fleshly⁵ counterparts on earth, some of whom appear later in the song (Pharaoh, Og, Sihon, etc.). We've seen this dual comparison before, originally in Psalm 2 (rulers of earth and heavenly princes). So God is greater than all the rulers of the heavenly places and the earthly nations.

The most important thing to realize as Christians about this triad is that the term "**Lord of lords**" is used in the NT along with "**King of kings**." In the NT, these titles refer to both the Father (**1Ti 6:15**) and the Son (**Rev 17:14; 19:16**). If that is true now, then we clearly have a reference to at least two persons of the Trinity here in Psalm 136 (for God does

⁵ I say "fleshly" rather than "human" because some were human (Pharaoh), while others were the great tyrant nephilim of old (Og and probably Sihon). They are enfleshed and are "men" but are not, properly speaking, human ('adam).

not change). Given that there are *three* names for God, I would suggest all Three Persons are present and accounted for. This makes the song trinitarian and Christological from the get-go. And therefore, **God's people from then until now are to explicitly worship the Triune God** rather than some unitarian monad who would be *anything but* greater than gods and lords or this present darkness. I can't think of a more rewarding and important thing for you to be doing than learning to read the text as God intended it in the OT—as being about a triune God.

As we move forward, it is important to note that **God created the gods and lords, angels and men**. This is a main reason why he is over them. This **creation** idea comes into sharper focus in the second of three triads.



Vv. 4-6 speak about **the wonders of God**. Before looking at those wonders, it is helpful to remember that this term for “wonder” (*pala*) is used throughout the OT to refer to the Son of God (**Ex 15:11; Jdg 13:18; Ps 78:4; Isa 9:6; etc.**). Moses’ “man of war” does “wonders.” The Angel of the LORD’s name is “wonderful.” The Messiah will be called “wonderful.” And so on.

This then fits well with what these wonders are said to be “**to him who alone does great wonders**” (**Ps 136:4**). These are the works **of creation**. “**By understanding he made the heavens**” (5). “Understanding” and “Wisdom” are often paralleled together; and in Proverbs 8, it is Wisdom-Understanding who ends up being a master craftsmen alongside of the Father who creates all things (esp. **Prov 8:1; 22-30**).⁶ Not only did he make the heavens, he also spread out the earth above the waters. So, this refers us back to Genesis 1 and the beginning of creation, where the Holy Spirit was hovering and the Firstborn Son was speaking all things into existence (see **Col 1:15-18; Heb 1:2-6**⁷). Thus, this triad (three “to hims,” one in each verse), like the

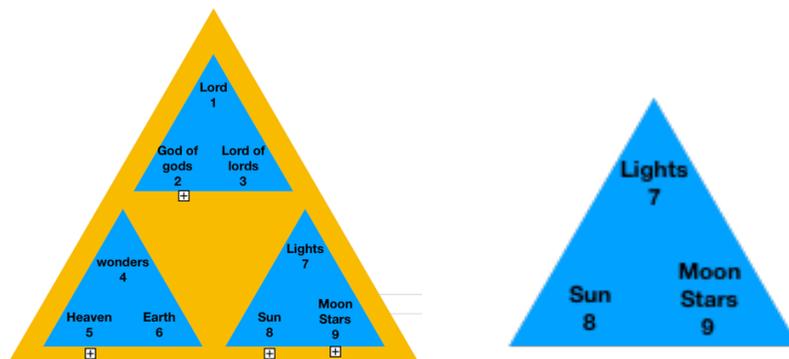
⁶ **Mark Smith**, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Fortress Press, 2010), has some good stuff on this and the next triad.

⁷ On the “Firstborn” being in Genesis 1:1 see my sermon on that passage.

former, teaches us through the idea of “three” that it is a triune God who made all things.

Here, you are starting to really see the importance of how understanding the structure can be helpful to theology. A song rooted in threes, with layers of triangles and triads, points you directly and specifically at the Triune God who inspired it by the Holy Spirit.

This creation theme continues in the third triad which when finished creates a Great Triangle (three triangles forming a greater triangle) as it finishes up God’s work of creation.



“To him who made the great lights” (7) ... “the sun to rule over the day” (8) ... “the moon and stars to rule over the night” (9). These lights might take the ancient Israelites back to the gods of vs. 2, as the heavenly objects were thought to

be related to them somehow. That would have been a good thought, because the point here is clear: God made them; they are not eternal.⁸ Moreover, he does not share his glory as Creator with anyone. As **vs. 4** said, “**To him alone who does**” these wonders. People steeped in a history of idolatry and syncretism needed to know this!

Thus, through the sacred number **three** being multiplied (3x3=9 verses), we have reinforcing the text that there is no other Creator but the Triune God. Thus, we are to give him triple thanks. But in each line, we are to understand that his steadfast love endures forever. How so? This is the vital link to the refrain and it is important to think about.

Consider **Genesis 1:14** which says, “**God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for the signs and for season, and for days and years.’”** These signs show God’s **steadfastness goodness to creation**, for he said “**it is good.**” Add to this the idea of covenant from **Jeremiah 33:20-22**,

⁸ Adding “stars” to this is important in this regard, as Genesis minimizes their presence as almost an after thought (Gen 1:16), probably because Genesis 1 is so polemical against the gods of the nations that it wants to deemphasize any role they may play in the created order of things. But here, that is not a problem, in fact, their presence only reinforces the point that God is over them.

“Thus says the LORD: if you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered ... so I will multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.”

God made a covenant with creation and this covenant extends to all mankind. Thus, God’s goodness extends to all mankind in what we call “common grace.”

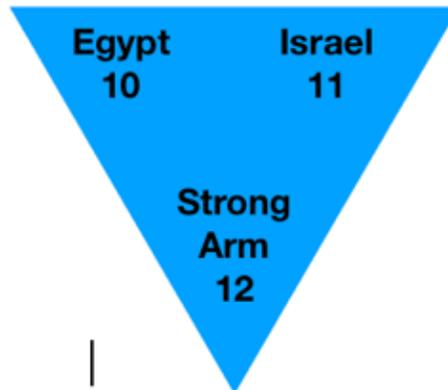
But this common grace is itself a sign; a sign which points to the very special grace he has for his chosen people (see **Ps 135:4**). That sign says, “If you can do anything to destroy my creation covenant, then perhaps my special gracious covenant in Christ will not come to pass. But if you can’t, then you must know that nothing can break my promises to the kings and priests of Israel that through them would come One who will one day come to bring people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation to salvation in his eternal kingdom of heaven. Nothing will stop me from sending the God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings.”

And behold two things in this regard. “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will treat the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:15). Then a great supper shall take place, a supper for vultures and scavengers who will feast upon the rotting flesh of those who did not bow their knee to this King (Rev 19:17-21). But another supper will take place soon thereafter. A supper wherein all who were invited and came will sit down with the King and feast with him in his wedding hall is given as he prepares to marry his glorious virgin bride: his church (19:7-9). For it is through Christ that his steadfast love to the world endure forever to those he has redeemed out of it.

God of Redemption (vv. 11-22)

Let us turn from this future redemption to the redemption of old which typified it in the next part of the song. Again, we have three triads which make for a series of

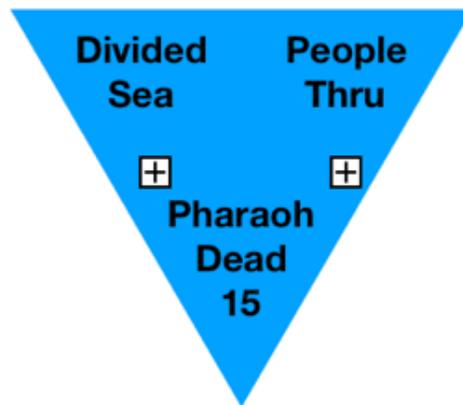
nine connected verses. The first mentions the two examples and then the one thing they have in common.



God “struck down the firstborn of Egypt” (Ps 136:10). However, he “brought Israel out from among them” (11). How did he do it? “With a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (12). We’ve seen how the Arm of the LORD is Christ as recently as the last song, for this idea is taken from it. “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the Arm of the LORD been revealed” (Isa 53:1), Isaiah asks? Well, that question begins perhaps the greatest Messianic prophecy in the entirety of the prophets. Isaiah 53 immediately begins to teach how the Arm of the LORD is revealed *through the Suffering Servant* who will come to die for the sins of his people and be raised from the dead three days later. And yet, “Behold, the Lord God (Adonai Yahweh) comes with might, and his Arm rules for him;”

behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him” (Isa 40:10), Isaiah had said previously. But in the NT the prophecy is fulfilled by Jesus who says, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (Rev 22:12). As Greg Beale puts it, “What is prophesied of the Lord in Isaiah is now prophesied by Jesus to be fulfilled by himself.”⁹

After God brings the people out of Egypt, he then saves them from Egypt altogether. This is recounted in the second of the three new triads.



Pharaoh had chased them, after God had hardened his heart again. And why? So that he might show his power in him

⁹ G. K. Beale, “Revelation,” In G. K. Beale, and D. A. Carson (ed.), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic, 2007), 1156.

and that **his Name** might be proclaimed in all the earth” (**Rom 9:17**; cf. **Ex 9:16**).

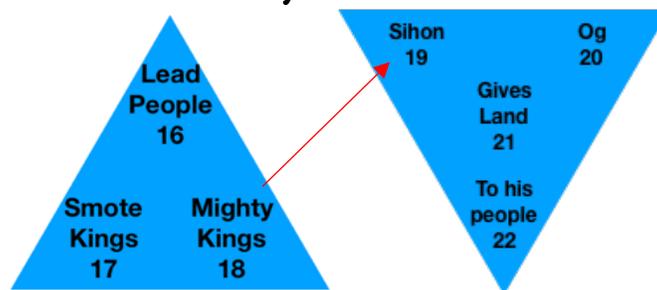
So the song sings, “**To him who divided the Red Sea in two...**” (**Ps 136:13**). Whereupon he “**made Israel pass through the midst of it...**” (**14**), “**but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea**” (**15**). As we saw, the “**him**” in Exodus and Romans is **the Name**, someone we saw was the focus of Psalm 135. But this Name, who is the Angel of the LORD was always surrounded by cloud or fire, images of the Holy Spirit. And thus, again, the triad points us to the Trinitarian work of a Triune God in these marvelous acts of redemption in Israel’s ancient history.

The **third triad** explains God’s power after the Sea, while they were in the wilderness and as they were going to enter the Promised Land.



In this way, it completes the Exodus redemption story. It says that “He led his people through the wilderness” (16). But he doesn’t just lead them, he also fights for them. “To him who struck down great kings...” (17), “and killed mighty kings...” (18). In this way, the “man of war” theology of the Angel of the LORD comes to the forefront, even as it did in the previous song. Christ fights for them as a warrior with a mighty sword sitting atop his glorious white steed. Not one, but many kings fell before the sharp edge of his hot blade. And the fear of God came upon all the nations when they heard of it.

Why? The answer is now as it was in the previous song. Because though many were ordinary kings, *some were extraordinary*. We can look at what follows as both an appendix to the second triad of triangles, that is, as adding specificity to it; and, we can think of it as having some kind of parallel with the last section of verses. It is important to see both, each in its own way.



In terms of what came before, the “mighty kings” is specified with two names. “Sihon, king of the Amorites...” (19) “and Og, king of Bashan...” (20). These terrible kings are remembered by Moses. We saw last week how the Amorites (a people group) like Sihon were said by the prophets to be as tall as trees. Here’s some stuff on Og. It says, “Only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? Nine cubits was its length (13.5 ft.), and four cubits (6 ft.) its breadth, according to the common cubit” (Deut 3:11).

Og lived in the area called Bashan. This is the modern Golan Heights, the area from Mt. Hermon south and east of the Sea of Galilee. It is desolate cattle land, but there are things there that are truly ancient.

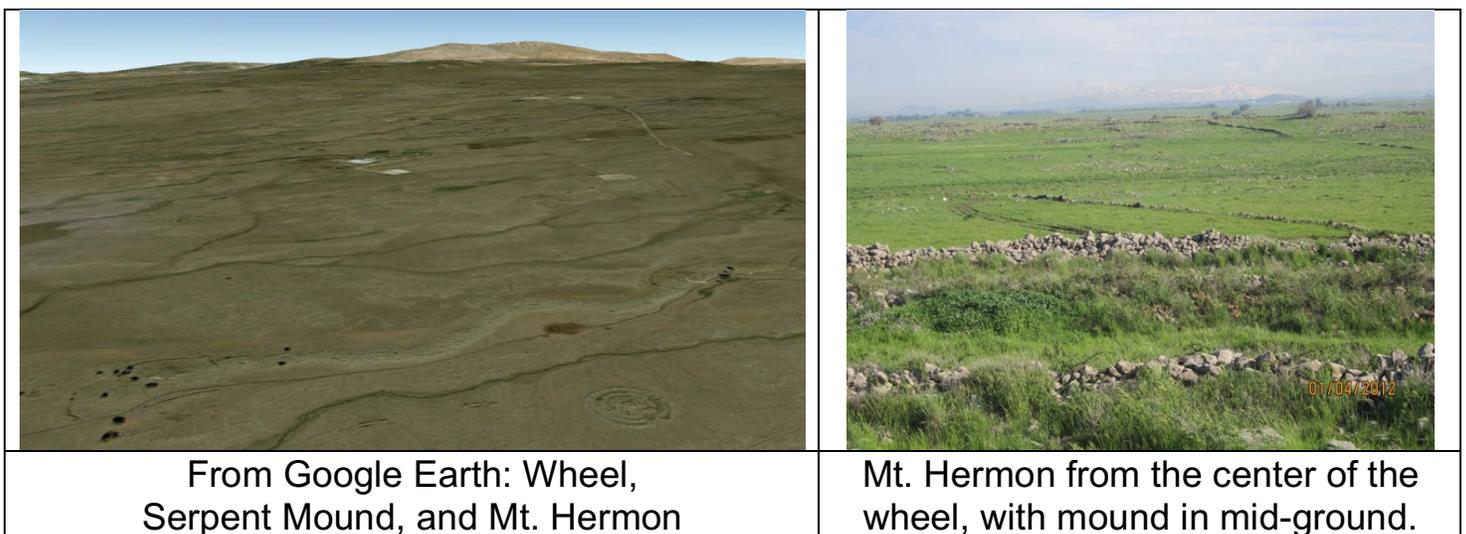


Mt. Hermon from somewhere south in Bashan

For example, one of the oldest archeological sites in Israel is found here. Today they call it **Gilgal Refaim** (lit. The Wheel of the Giants). Why? Because it looks kind of like a wheel. Strangely, Og's name means "wheel" and he was a Rephaim!



Gilgal Refaim



The whole area is littered with **dolmans**—ancient burial chambers made up of vertical slabs weighing several tons. Archeologists think that among other things, the Wheel of Giants was at one point a burial tomb and the word “bed” in Deuteronomy can actually be translated as a dolman.¹⁰ Given that the **Rephaim** are said to be descended from the **Nephilim** (the giants of **Gen 6** and **Num 13**),¹¹ in the ancient Jewish and Christian mind, this made Og and Sihon preternatural, demigods, and therefore much more fearsome than ordinary kings like Pharaoh. The point is, *God crushed them.*

But this power over the giants turns into a different focus in the song. “**And gave their land as a heritage...**” (21). When Moses was on his way to Canaan, God sent a warning to Og and Sihon to let the people pass through unharmed. They wouldn’t listen. And therefore, God defeated the giants through Moses and his army. However, because they lived on the east side of the Jordan, that land of Bashan was considered a bit differently than the land of Canaan. Yet,

¹⁰ You can read more in the Chapter on Og in my good *Giants: Sons of the Gods*.

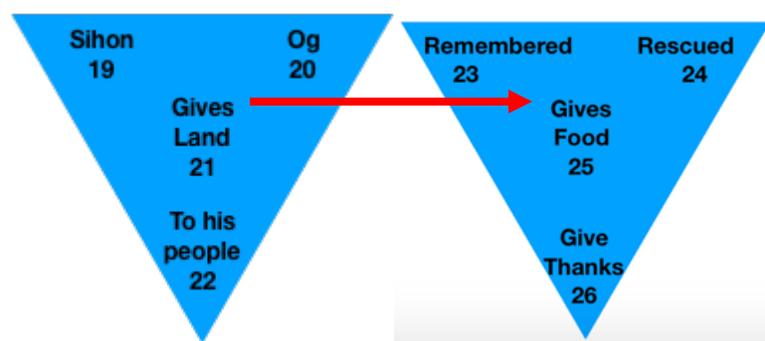
¹¹ This takes place through connected verses. The Anakim are said to be Nephilim (Num 13:33). The Anakim are said to be Rephaim giants in Deut 2:11. Therefore, the Rephaim are also Nephilim (as are other giant tribes, especially in Genesis 14 and Deuteronomy 2).

when the land is divided, 2 ½ tribes end up receiving this land as their inheritance (cf. **Deut 3:13; 34:1-2**; etc.). This land became part of the Promised Land!

“The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away,” Job once said. “Blessed be the Name of the LORD.” Here, God takes from Og and gives to Israel. The point is repeated in **vs. 22**, “a heritage to Israel his servant,” so that you can see that he is taking from the enemy and giving to his friend who serves him faithfully. It is this “giving” that becomes the connection to the last set of verses in the song.

God of The Present (vv. 23-26)

The last four verses take us out of creation and redemption past, into what I would call the **new creation** and **new redemption** (present). This is really where the past meets the present and it thus the climax of the song.



There are two key-words that link the past with the present: *Remembered* and *Rescued*. “It is he who remembered us in our low estate...” (23). “And rescued us from our foes” (24). This no longer refers to Israel of old, but rather, to **the Israel of the return from exile**. Like all the songs of Book V of the Psalter, the immediate context is the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and God’s bring the people back to the land. They are the ones singing about God remembering them in a low estate (in Babylon). They are the ones remembering how God rescued them from their various foes (we say many even in Nehemiah).

This seems to be the main reason why the song began to be sung during Passover. For in those latter days, God was doing **a new redeeming work** for his people, which was most appropriate for singing at Passover time in a new and fresh context. How vital is it to know that God didn’t just do one great thing once-upon-a-time? Rather, he continues to do them, and what happened long ago is but a sample of **his ever-continuing steadfast covenant love for his people**, a love that endures *forever*? This was the lesson Ezra and Nehemiah taught their people.

However, God also gave them food after such redemption. VanGemeren and others see this as a return to the creation theme. “The hymn returns to a reflection of God’s goodness as the Creator. His ‘love’ to all of creation is evident in that he continually cares for his creatures. He promised to Noah and to all ‘flesh’” to sustain it with his grace (cf. Gen 9:8–17). Here the psalmist makes use of the word ‘flesh’” (*bāsār*; NIV, “creature”) and thus makes an allusion to God’s promise (cf. Gen 9:11, 15–17; NIV, ‘creatures’).”¹² In this way, the song returns to the broadness of the message, for all people who will come to the LORD be they Jew or Gentile, pre- or post-Israel’s creation.

Hence, we have many applications for us today. The first is simply that like Ezra and Nehemiah and those after the exile, it is appropriate to remember God’s new graces, not just the old. What has God done for our church, our land, his people in our day all across the country and the world? He is saving, protecting, giving common grace,

NIV The New International Version

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¹² Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 825–826.

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electing grace, persevering us, being faithful to us, and so on. However, we never divorce his old wonders from his new ones. It is the same Triune God who continually works wonders in the world of men. Is this not the point of the refrain sung 26 times that his steadfast love endures *forever*?

Second, God's love is wrapped up in covenant—always. From the creation covenant to the gracious covenants with his people in the OT, this continued to be the case. And it continues anew in *the new covenant* that Christ made in his own blood, whereby he feeds his people with manna from heaven and sacramental food that nourishes body and soul.

Third, this new covenant then becomes the context for the **new creation** and **new redemption**. We “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is Christ Jesus” (**Rom 3:24**). We “eagerly wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (**8:23**). “Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (**1Co 1:30**). “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (**Eph 1:7**). For he “secured eternal redemption” (**Heb 9:12**).

Likewise, “If he rescued [in the past those] greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment” (2Pe 2:7-9). This becomes deeply person. “The Lord rescued *me*,” even one who greatly persecuted his people (2Ti 3:11). Not only from hell and death, but even in this life. “I was rescued from the lion’s mouth” so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it” (2Ti 4:17). And the final rescue, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” (4:18). Putting them together in one short passage, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14).

These are glorious truths that constantly led those writers of the NT to burst forth in praise, just like the Psalm. Paul concludes one of these saying, “To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2Ti 4:18). The song concludes, “Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever” (Ps 136:26). Thus ends the **Great Hallel**.

But I hope it only begins your days of praising God anew. I'm not stuck having merely to remember such a great weekend 25 years ago when I chanted his song from the top of the world with my friends. No. God's mercies are new every morning, and since this is the day the Lord has made, I can sing Psalm 136 any time I want, knowing that there are always new graces and benefits being given to me each and every day.

And more, I can sing it with God's covenant people as together we learn to grow in Christ, even in the midst of great hurt and suffering. For it is in giving thanks that we avoid the very first sin of Romans 1, the sin that leads to all others: thanklessness. Do not let your hearts become calloused with God's good gifts. Do not use those things as an excuse to worship the creation rather than the Creator. But give thanks to God for his steadfast love, a love which endures in ages past, in the present, and on into eternity to those who love God and have been called according to his purposes.