

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: July 23, 2017

Lesson Title: "His Love"

Lesson Passage: Psalm 136:1-6,10-15,23-26

ABOUT THIS LESSON

As you read through Psalm 136, you will notice that the refrain, "*for his steadfast love endures for ever,*" appears in every verse. This is because this was written as a liturgical psalm, similar to what we know as a "responsive reading," used in the celebration of one of the major annual festivals in the Temple. The first half of each verse was probably sung by a priest or a Levite, and the second half was sung by either the congregation or the choir in response to the first half. The psalm opens with a call for all people to give thanks to Yahweh (vv. 1-3). He is praised for having created the universe (vv. 4-6), and for rescuing his people from Egypt (vv. 10-15). After an expression of gratitude for Yahweh's continuing care (vv. 23-25) the psalm closes with a final call to praise Him (v. 26).

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain how Psalm 136 was used in Temple worship services.
- (2) Explain two reasons for praising God, according to Psalm 136.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, lead the class in a responsive reading, selected from your church hymnal. (NOTE: Most traditional hymnals have a section entitled "RESPONSIVE READINGS." Several editions of The Baptist Hymnal include a reading entitled "LOVE, MERCY, and GRACE" that consists of selections from Psalm 136. If your current church hymnal doesn't include responsive readings, consider making copies of a responsive reading from an older hymnal from your church library.) This approach might entail a little extra preparation, but it will be an excellent way to demonstrate the actual use of Psalm 136 in ancient Israel.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Observe that this psalm opens with a call to the worshiping congregation to "give thanks to the Lord." Call attention to the repetition of this summons in the first three verses: Comment on the importance of thanksgiving as a constant element in Hebrew worship, as reflected in the Psalms (Examples: Psalm 100:4, 105:1, 106:1, 107:1, 118:1.) APPLICATION: Thanksgiving should always have a place of central importance not only in our corporate worship, but, also, in our daily lives. The tradition of "giving thanks" at mealtimes seems to be on the decline today, but should be reinstated by Christian families who have gotten away from the practice. (Ask someone to read 1 Thessalonians 5:18.)*

2. *The basic reasons the psalmist gives for giving thanks to God are*

written in boldface print in the headings below. Use these as an outline as you discuss the content of Psalm 136:

GOD'S GOODNESS AND HIS UNCHANGING LOVE (Ps. 136:1-3): (1) The psalmist is thankful because God's love, unlike human love, remains forever the same. It is not altered by changing circumstances or by human conduct. It is an absolute on which we can always count. (2) In verse 2 the Lord is called "the God of gods" ("the greatest of all gods") and in verse 3 the "Lord of lords" ("the mightiest of all lords"). This is related to the fact that Yahweh is absolutely unique, unlike mythological gods, who are impetuous, temperamental and peevish.

GOD'S WORK IN CREATION (Ps. 136:4-9). (1) *In verses 4-9, the reason for giving thanks is God's work in creation.* The underlying thought in these verses is that all of the Creator's work reflects His understanding, wisdom and power. The majesty of the universe is, to the Hebrew poet, a revelation not only of the greatness of God, but also His goodness. (2) *Ask class members to compare the descriptions of the Creator's work in Psalm 136:4-9 with the creation account in Genesis 1:6-18.* ("To him that by wisdom made the heavens"-- Gen. 1:6-8. "To him that stretched out the earth above the waters"-- Gen. 1:9. "To him that made great lights"--Gen. 1:14-15. "To him that made...the sun to rule by day...the moon and stars to rule by night"--Gen 1:16-18.)

GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL FROM EGYPT (PSALM 136:10-15). "To him who smote the first-born of Egypt" (v. 10) refers to the last of the plagues, the killing of the first-born of sons of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:29; Psalm 78:51). "And brought Israel out from among them" (v. 11) means "He led the people of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 12:41). "To him who divided the Red Sea...but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea" (v. 13-15) refers to the Lord's miraculous act of deliverance at the Red Sea (described in Exodus 14:21-30).

GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF ISRAEL IN TIMES OF DISTRESS (PS. 136:23-24). These verses refer to Yahweh's constant care of His people. The Hebrew word translated "in our low estate" (v. 23) means "low place" or "humiliation". It probably refers to a particular event, possibly the Babylonian exile.

GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE OF EARTH'S INHABITANTS (PS.136:25). In v. 25, "all flesh" means "all living creatures" or "everything that eats." ILLUSTRATION: "He gives food to all flesh" refers to a divine blessing of enormous proportions. Although it would be impossible to come up with an exact count of Earth's animal species, the best scientific estimates number 18 billion chickens, 1.4 billion cattle, 1 billion sheep, and between 200 and 400 billion birds, in addition to the world's population of 7 billion human beings. Indeed, the Lord is a great God, great beyond our imagination.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Ask the class to repeat Ps. 136:26 as a closing benediction.