

Psalm 118:2-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-118/psalm-1182-4/>

The psalmist concludes his introductory chorus by emphatically reinforcing the truth that the LORD's lovingkindness is everlasting. He does this by repeating three times what he said in verse 1. He calls upon Israel, the Levites, and those who fear the LORD to speak this bedrock truth with their own mouths.

King David, the likely psalmist, emphatically repeats an important truth from the opening line of this "Hosanna Hallel" three more times in his introductory chorus (Psalm 118:1-4) before he begins to describe his intensely personal "distress" (Psalm 118:5).

Psalm 118 begins and ends with an exhortation to "Give thanks to the LORD" (Psalm 118:1a, 29a). Thankfulness is the underlying perspective the psalmist chooses to adopt throughout this psalm. He invites his readers to adopt it as well. The reason the psalmist exhorts us to "give thanks" is because "the LORD is good" (Psalm 118:1a, 29a). And the evidence the psalmist gives *for the LORD's* absolute goodness is: "His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psalm 118:1b, 29b).

The Hebrew word translated as *lovingkindness* is חֶסֶד (H2616). It is pronounced "hesed." It can be translated as "mercy," "kindness," "favor," "steadfast love," or "loyalty." The psalmist is referring to all these definitions when he describes *the LORD's everlasting* "hesed"/mercy at the same time. *The LORD's lovingkindness* lasts forever (*everlasting*) and *His* "hesed" is in all places (Psalm 34:5)

The *everlasting* nature of *the LORD's lovingkindness* is the baseline or expressed presupposition of this entire psalm. It is the truth the psalmist will cling to during the distress he describes in the first part of Psalm 118. The *everlasting lovingkindness* of *the LORD* is celebrated in the second part of Psalm 118.

This truth is so foundational to the psalmist that he repeats it three times immediately after he introduces it,

His lovingkindness is everlasting (v 2b, 3b, 4b).

Another possible reason he says this phrase five times in this psalm (Psalm 118:1, 2, 3, 4, 29) is because it is easy to forget that *the LORD* is good and that *His lovingkindness is everlasting*, especially when we are in the middle of distress (Psalm 118:5).

Before each of the psalmist's repetitions, he exhorts a different group of people to proclaim this wonderful fact.

The first group the psalmist exhorts is *Israel*,

Oh let Israel say,

“His lovingkindness is everlasting” (v 2).

Israel refers to the nation of *Israel*, God’s covenant people.

The LORD’s everlasting covenant with Israel began with Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3). It continued through Abraham’s promised son, Isaac (Genesis 21:12, 26:3). And it continued again through Isaac’s second born, Jacob (later renamed “Israel” by the Angel of the LORD—Genesis 32:28) (Genesis 28:13-15, 35:9-12).

The LORD then extends *His* everlasting covenant to *Israel’s* descendants at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6) and the people of *Israel* agree to do all that the LORD has spoken (Exodus 19:7-8). The rest of Exodus 19 through Chapter 23 details the specifics—including the ten commandments—of what the *everlasting* covenant between *the LORD* and *Israel* entails. After this:

“Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’”
(Exodus 24:3)

The same generation of *Israel* repeatedly violated their *everlasting* covenant with *the LORD*.

- *Israel* worshipped the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1-9).
- *Israel* complained about the manna God had provided for them to eat in the wilderness (Numbers 11:4-9).
- *Israel* was afraid to trust *the LORD* and rebelled against *His* plan for them to conquer the Promised Land (Numbers 14:1-10, 22).
- *Israel* continually complained throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness against *the LORD* and *His* servant Moses (Numbers 16:1-40, 16:41, 21:4-5), and doubted *the LORD’s* provisions (Numbers 20:1-5)

Despite *Israel’s* constant violations of their *everlasting* covenant with *the LORD*, *the LORD’s* *lovingkindness* (“hesed”) toward *His* people was *everlasting*.

The LORD renewed *His* *everlasting* covenant with the next generation of *Israel* (Deuteronomy 26:16-19) and the people of *Israel* once again agreed to follow it (Deuteronomy 26:17, 27:11-26).

But the generations of *Israel* failed to keep their *everlasting* covenant with *the LORD* throughout the period of the Judges, and were misled by King Saul. But *the LORD’s* *lovingkindness* (“hesed”) was constant throughout all of *Israel’s* shortcomings. As the Apostle Paul asserts, God’s promises to *Israel* still stand, because *His* gifts are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Here, in his psalm, King David, the likely psalmist, is exhorting the nation of *Israel* to *say and proclaim the LORD's everlasting "hesed"* toward them.

After exhorting Israel, the second group the psalmist exhorts is *the house of Aaron*,

*Oh let the house of Aaron say,
"His lovingkindness is everlasting"* (v 3).

The second group of people the psalmist refers to narrows the field from all of *Israel* to one specific tribe within *Israel*.

The house of Aaron is a reference to the priestly class of *Israel*—a subset of the Levites.

Aaron was the brother of Moses, and his partner in helping lead *Israel* out of Egypt. *Aaron* is considered to be the founding high priest of Israel (Exodus 28:1-43, 29:9). As priests, *the house of Aaron* was to mediate between *the LORD* and *Israel* by administering the sacrifices. Their priestly tasks are recorded in the book of Leviticus.

Members of *the house of Aaron* were to be the spiritual leaders of *Israel*. It was their job to remind the people to "Give thanks, for the LORD is good" (Psalm 118:1, 29) and *His lovingkindness is everlasting*. It is good for them to *say and proclaim: His lovingkindness is everlasting*.

And as spiritual leaders it was good for *the house of Aaron* to remember *His everlasting "hesed"/mercy* lest they grow impatient and unmerciful toward the people they were to serve. Moreover, *the house of Aaron* themselves did not keep their covenant with *the LORD*:

- *Aaron* followed the people and made the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1-4).
- *The sons of Aaron* "offered strange fire before the LORD which He had not commanded" (Leviticus 10:1-3).
- *Aaron* complained against the leadership of the LORD's servant, Moses (Numbers 12:1-12).
- *Aaron* sinned with Moses when they did not believe the LORD and struck the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20:12, 23-29).
- The sons of Eli the priest were wicked (1 Samuel 2:12-17).

From these examples, it is clear *the house of Aaron* violated the holy laws which *the LORD* gave to them. So they needed to speak and remember in order to maintain a true perspective of God.

Even though the house of Aaron failed in their stewardship, *the LORD* remained merciful and faithful. *His lovingkindness* toward *the house of Aaron* was *everlasting*.

Even though *the house of Aaron* experienced negative consequences for their disobedience, *the LORD's* “hesed”/mercy remained.

A contemporary application of this charge is: *Oh let* anyone in positions of spiritual leadership (pastors, missionaries, heads of ministry organizations, parents, mentors, etc.) *say: “His lovingkindness is forever.”*

The third group the psalmist exhorts is *those who fear the LORD*,

Oh let those who fear the LORD say, “His lovingkindness is everlasting” (v 4).

Instead of narrowing the field from the nation of *Israel* to a specific tribe within *Israel* as the psalmist did with the second group, the third and final group of people the psalmist refers to expands the field beyond all of *Israel*. He expands his exhortation to all *those who fear the LORD*.

This third term includes the nation of *Israel* and *the house of Aaron*, but it also includes anyone *who fears the LORD*—including Gentiles.

Those who fear the LORD are *those who* are more concerned about *the LORD's* opinion of them than anything else. Consequently, *those who fear the LORD* seek to obey *His* commands no matter the cost (Matthew 6:33-34).

Those who fear the LORD can fearlessly follow *the LORD* because they know *His lovingkindness is everlasting*. They need not worry about the present consequences—such as political oppression, sickness, torture, exile, or death for doing so, because they know they have faith that *the LORD* is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

They also know that *His* rewards are of much greater and everlasting worth than any benefit they would receive for not obeying Him in this life (Matthew 19:28-29, Romans 8:16, Corinthians 4:16-18, Hebrews 10:35-36, James 1:12, 1 Peter 1:6-7, Revelation 3:21). *Those who fear the LORD* seek first *His* kingdom and *His* righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

It is good for *those who fear the LORD* to proclaim and *say: His lovingkindness is everlasting* because they will need this perspective to endure the temptations and trials that they will encounter in this life.

Speaking this truth out loud, as the psalmist exhorts *Israel*, *the house of Aaron*, and *those who fear the LORD* to do, if only to remind oneself, is a way for *those who fear the LORD* to “take courage” as Jesus the Messiah, instructed *His* disciples to do whenever they encountered tribulation in the world (John 16:33).

Again, the psalmist says this line four times in the first four verses to establish this as the prevailing truth to recall throughout the “distress” he will describe in Psalm 118:5-18.

And *oh let us say* this truth one more time before we begin considering the depths of the distress he describes:

His lovingkindness is everlasting!

Biblical Text

² **Oh let Israel say,**

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

³ **Oh let the house of Aaron say,**

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

⁴ **Oh let those who fear the LORD say,**

“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”