

Alexander Massey

Ki L'Olam Chasdo

Psalm 136 (selected verses)

(voice & guitar)

including an essay-commentary
on the text and music

Shir Publications

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Ki L'Olam Chasdo

Psalm 136 – Great *Hallel*– *Hodu Ladonai*

Verses 1, 2, 5, 6, 16, 25, 3, 26

Psalm 136, the 'Great *Hallel*', is often referred to by its opening words – '*Hodu Ladonai*'. My version is called *Ki L'Olam Chasdo* for two reasons. First, the words *ki l'olam chasdo* ('indeed, His loving-kindness is endless') are repeated so often that they become the dominant and memorable idea, so it seemed natural to use this as the title. Second, the conventional use of *ladonai* as a substitute for the unpronounceable God-name of *YHVH* might distract from the fact that this psalm uses a God-name just four times, a different version each time. Verse 2 uses *elohei ha'elohim*, verse 26 uses *eil hashamayim* (the only occurrence of this version in the Bible). Verse 3 uses *adonei ha'adonim* – this term usually refers to the severe and difficult-to-approach 'Lord' figure. Verse 1 uses *YHVH*, usually spoken as *Adonai*, but my feeling is that this makes it sound too similar to the *adonei* of verse 3. In reality, *YHVH* refers to the merciful and tender-hearted aspect of God, the one who shows *chesed*– the loving-kindness that this psalm is all about.

From the original 26 verses of this psalm, I have selected just eight. The four 'God'-verses have been paired, verse 1 with 2, and 3 with 26, to create the beginning and ending of this new setting. *Yah* and *elohei* are the more Jewish names for God, while *adonei* and *eil* are more universal. This balance between national particularism and universality shows throughout the psalm, and I chose the other 4 verses to reflect this. By naming heaven, earth, and the mystical 'waters', verses 5 and 6 use a shorthand to proclaim God as the Creator of everything. Ensuing verses declare God's particular intervention in the history and protection of the Israelites.

I have selected verse 16 (God leading 'His' people in the wilderness) to represent this role. Interestingly, selected in this way for my setting, the verse can also be understood universally. All people are God's people. And the 'wilderness' not just the desert through which the Israelites travelled, but a metaphor for the wild and unexpected terrain of life itself that all of us have to navigate. Verse 25, the penultimate verse in the psalm, makes the universal point that God feeds all life. So, while there are historical references to God's role in the life of Israel, the larger point of this psalm is, for me, undoubtedly that God loves all people, all life, and all of Creation. The last God name *eil hashamayim* drives home this point.

The word '*ki*' is often translated as 'for' or 'because'. I'm not convinced that would work as a translation in every verse of psalm 136, or in the 8-line version I have selected here. To use 'for' or 'because' might imply a specific – and arguably narrow – motivation to God's actions. However, using the option of the emphatic 'indeed' does seem to work here. It highlights our perceptions as beneficiaries of God's loving-kindness, and leaves God's

motives as unknowable. For us to emphasise God's loving-kindness is to invite its bounty into our lives.

1. O give thanks to YHVH, for He is good, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
O give thanks to the God of gods, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.

Chorus: Indeed, His loving-kindness is endless. [x3]

2. Creating the heavens with discernment, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
Spreading the earth above the waters, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
3. Leading His people through the wilderness, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
He gives food to all flesh; indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
4. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.
O give thanks to the Deity of heaven, indeed His loving-kindness is endless.

Ki L'olam Chasdo

Music: Alexander Massey

Hodu L'Adonai Ps 136

Words: Ps 136:1-2, 5-6, 16, 25, 3, 26

1 in a bar ♩=139

V1 Em Em/G F#m7 B7 Em Em/G Am A#dim B7

Ho - du I' - Yah ki tov; _____ ki _____ I' - o - lam chas - do; ho -

9 G G/B D B7 B7/D#Em Em/B B7 Em Em

du lei - lo - hei ha - ei - lo - him; _____ ki I' - o - lam chas - do. _____

Ch Am Am/E Am Am/E Em Em/B Em Em/B Am6/C

Ki _____ I' - o - lam chas - do, ki _____ I' - o - lam chas - do, ki

26 Am7 Em/B B7 Em ^{1.} Em **V2** Em Em/G F#m7

I' - o - lam chas - do. _____ L' - o - seih ha - sha - ma - yim bit' - vu - nah, _____

34 B7 Em Em/G Am A#dim B7 G G/B D

_____ ki _____ I' - o - lam chas - do; I' - ro - ka ha - a - retz, al ha - ma -

42 B7 B7/D#Em Em/B B7 Em Em ^{2.} Em **V3** Em Em/G

yim, ki I' - o - lam chas - do. _____ L' - mo - lich a - mo ba - mid' -

50 F#m7 B7 Em Em/G Am A#dim B7 G G/B

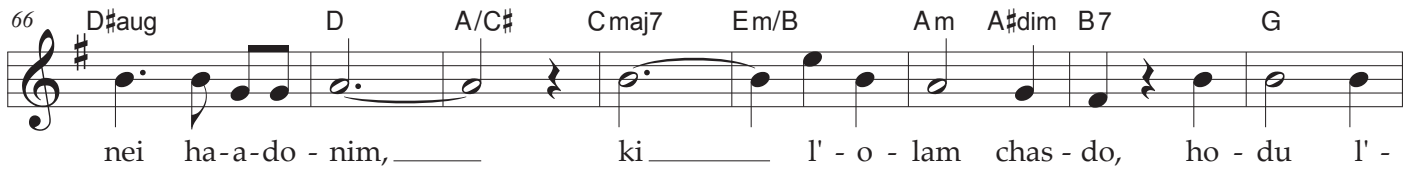
bar, _____ ki _____ I' - o - lam chas - do, no - tein le - chem I' - chol ba -

58 D B7 B7/D#Em Em/B B7 Em Em ^{3.} Em **V4** Em

sar, _____ ki I' - o - lam chas - do. _____ Ho - du la' - a - do -

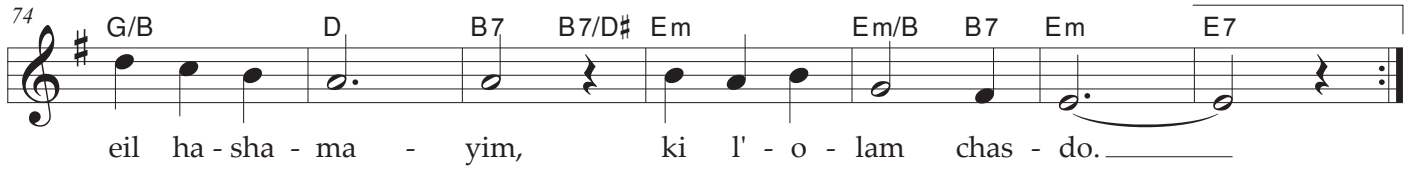
Ki L'olam Chasdo - Massey

66 D#aug D A/C# Cmaj7 Em/B Am A#dim B7 G



nei ha-a-do - nim, _____ ki _____ l' - o - lam chas - do, ho - du l' -


74 G/B D B7 B7/D# Em Em/B B7 Em E7



eil ha - sha - ma - yim, ki l' - o - lam chas - do. _____

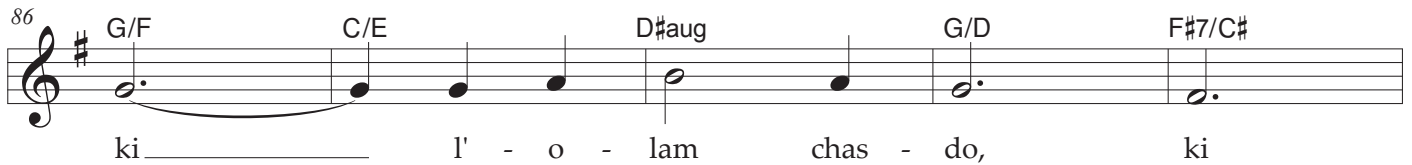
81 4. E7/G# Am Am/G# Am/G Am/F#

Coda



Ki _____ l' - o - lam chas - do,

86 G/F C/E D#aug G/D F#7/C#



ki _____ l' - o - lam chas - do, ki

91 C7 A#dim B7 Em Em



l' - o - lam chas - do. _____

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