
For the Chief Musician. By David, the servant of the LORD.

PSALM 36: 1 An oracle is within my heart about the disobedience of the wicked: "There is no fear of God before his eyes."

The miserable state of the wicked, Psa 36:1-4. The excellence of God's mercy in itself, and to his followers, Psa 36:5-9. He prays for the upright, Psa 36:10; for himself that he may be saved from pride and violence, Psa 36:11; and shows the end of the workers of iniquity, Psa 36:12.

The title in the Hebrew is, To the conqueror to the servant of Jehovah, to David. The Syriac and Arabic suppose it to have been composed on occasion of Saul's persecution of David. Calmet supposes, on good grounds, that it was written during the Babylonish captivity. It is one of the finest Psalms in the whole collection.

Verse 1

The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart - It is difficult to make any sense of this line as it now stands. How can the transgression of the wicked speak with in my heart? But instead of לבי libbi, My heart, four of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have לבו libbo, His heart. "The speech of transgression to the wicked is in the midst of his heart." "There is no fear of God before his eyes." It is not by example that such a person sins; the fountain that sends forth the impure streams is in his own heart. There the spirit of transgression lives and reigns; and, as he has no knowledge of God, so he has no fear of God; therefore, there is no check to his wicked propensities: all come to full effect. Lust is conceived, sin is brought forth vigorously, and transgression is multiplied. The reading above proposed, and which should be adopted, is supported by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon. This latter reads the sentence thus: which I shall give as nearly as possible in the order of the original. "Quoth the unrightwise, that he do guilt in himself: is not fear God's at fore eyes his." That is, The unrighteous man saith in himself that he will sin: God's fear is not before his eyes. The old Psalter, in language as well as meaning, comes very near to the Anglo-Saxon: The unrightwis saide that he trespas in hym self: the drede of God es nocht before his een. And thus it paraphrases the passage: The unryghtwis, that es the kynde [the whole generation] of wyked men; said in hym self, qwar man sees nocht; that he trespas, that es, he synne at his wil, als [as if] God roght nocht [did not care] qwat he did; and so it es sene, that the drede of God es nocht by forehis een; for if he dred God, he durst nocht so say."

I believe these versions give the true sense of the passage. The psalmist here paints the true state of the Babylonians: they were idolaters of the grossest kind, and worked iniquity with greediness. The account we have in the book of Daniel of this people, exhibits them in the worst light; and profane history confirms the account. Bishop Horsley thinks that the word פשע pasha, which we render transgression, signifies the apostate or devil. The devil says to the wicked, within his heart, There is no fear; i.e., no cause of fear: "God is not before his eyes." Placing the colon after fear takes away all ambiguity in connection with the reading His heart, already contended for. The principle of transgression, sin in the heart, says, or suggests to every sinner, there is no cause for fear: go on, do not fear, for there is no danger. He obeys this suggestion, goes on, and acts wickedly, as "God is not before his eyes."

PSALM 36: 2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes, too much to detect and hate his sin.

Verse 2

For he flattereth himself - He is ruled by the suggestion already mentioned; endeavours to persuade himself that he may safely follow the propensities of his own heart, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. He sins so boldly, that at last he becomes detestable. Some think the words should be thus understood: "He smootheth over in his own eyes with respect to the finding out of his iniquity, to hate it. That is, he sets such a false gloss in his own eyes upon his worst actions, that he never finds out the blackness of his iniquity; which were it perceived by him, would be hateful even to himself."
- Bishop Horsley.

PSALM 36: 3 The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He has ceased to be wise and to do good.

Verse 3

The words of his mouth are iniquity - In the principle; and deceit calculated to pervert others, and lead them astray.

He hath left off to be wise, and to do good - His heart is become foolish, and his actions wicked. He has cut off the connection between himself and all righteousness.

PSALM 36: 4 He plots iniquity on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He doesn't abhor evil.

Verse 4

He deviseth mischief upon his bed - He seeks the silent and undisturbed watches of the night, in order to fix his plans of wickedness.

He setteth himself - Having laid his plans he fixes his purpose to do what is bad; and he does it without any checks of conscience or abhorrence of evil. He is bent only on mischief, and lost to all sense of God and goodness. A finished character of a perfect sinner.

PSALM 36: 5 Your loving kindness, LORD, is in the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

Verse 5

Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens - That is, thou art abundant, infinite in thy mercy; else such transgressors must be immediately cut off; but thy long-suffering is intended to lead them to repentance.

Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds - עַד שְׁחָקִים ad shechakim, to the eternal regions; above all visible space. God's faithfulness binds him to fulfill the promises and covenants made by his mercy. Blessings from the heavens, from the clouds, from the earth, are promised by God to his followers; and his faithfulness is in all those places, to distribute to his followers the mercies he has promised.

PSALM 36: 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God. Your judgements are like a great deep. LORD, you preserve man and animal.

Verse 6

Thy righteousness is like the great mountains - כַּהֲרֵי אֵל keharerey El, like the mountains of God; exceeding high mountains; what, in the present language of geology, would be called primitive mountains, those that were formed at the beginning; and are not the effects of earthquakes or inundations, as secondary and alluvial mountains are supposed to be.

Thy judgments are a great deep - תְּהוֹם רַבָּה tehom rabbah, the great abyss; as incomprehensible as the great chaos, or first matter of all things which God created in the beginning, and which is mentioned Gen 1:2, and darkness was on the face, תְּהוֹם tehom, of the deep, the vast profound, or what is below all conjecturable profundity. How astonishing are the thoughts in these two verses! What an idea do they give us of the mercy, truth, righteousness, and judgments of God!

The old Psalter, in paraphrasing mountains of God, says, Thi ryghtwisnes, that es, ryghtwis men, er gastly hilles of God; for that er hee in contemplacioun, and soner resayves the lyght of Crist. Here is a metaphor taken from the tops of mountains and high hills first catching the rays of the rising sun. "Righteous men are spiritual hills of God; for they are high in contemplation, and sooner receive the light of Christ." It is really a very fine thought; and much beyond the rudeness of the times in which this Psalter was written.

Man and beast - Doth God take care of cattle? Yes, he appoints the lions their food, and hears the cry of the young ravens; and will he not provide for the poor, especially the poor of his people? He will. So infinitely and intensely good is the nature of God, that it is his delight to make all his creatures happy. He preserves the man, and he preserves the beast; and it is his providence which supplies the man, when his propensities and actions level him with the beasts that perish.

PSALM 36: 7 How precious is your loving kindness, God! The children of men take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

Verse 7

How excellent is thy loving-kindness - He asks the question in the way of admiration; but expects no answer from angels or men. It is indescribably excellent, abundant, and free; and, "therefore, the children of Adam put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." They trust in thy good providence for the supply of their bodies; they trust in thy mercy for the salvation of their souls. These, speaking after the figure, are the two wings of the Divine goodness, under which the children of men take refuge. The allusion may be to the wings of the cherubim, above the mercy-seat.

PSALM 36: 8 They shall be abundantly satisfied with the abundance of your house. You will make them drink of the river of your pleasures.

Verse 8

They shall be abundantly satisfied - יריון yirveyun, they shall be saturated, as a thirsty field is by showers from heaven. Inebriaduntur, they shall be inebriated - Vulgate. That shall be drunken of the plenteuoste of thi house. - Old Psalter. This refers to the joyous expectation they had of being restored to their own land, and to the ordinances of the temple.

Of the river of thy pleasures - נחל אדניך nachal adaneycha, (or עדניך edencha, as in four MSS)., the river of thy Eden. They shall be restored to their paradisaical estate; for here is a reference to the river that ran through the garden of Eden, and watered it; Gen 2:10. Or the temple, and under it the Christian Church, may be compared to this Eden; and the gracious influences of God to be had in his ordinances, to the streams by which that garden was watered, and its fertility promoted.

PSALM 36: 9 For with you is the spring of life. In your light shall we see light.

Verse 9

For with thee is the fountain of life - This, in Scripture phrase, may signify a spring of water; for such was called among the Jews living water, to distinguish it from ponds, tanks, and reservoirs, that were supplied by water either received from the clouds, or conducted into them by pipes and streams from other quarters. But there seems to be a higher allusion in the sacred text. כי עמך מקור חיים ki immecha mekor chiyim, "For with thee is the vein of lives." Does not this allude to the great aorta, which, receiving the blood from the heart, distributes it by the arteries to every part of the human body, whence it is conducted back to the heart by means of the veins. As the heart, by means of the great aorta, distributes the blood to the remotest parts of the body; so, God, by Christ Jesus, conveys the life-giving streams of his providential goodness to all the worlds and beings he has created, and the influences of his grace and mercy to every soul that has sinned. All spiritual and temporal good comes from Him, the Father, through Him, the Son, to every part of the creation of God.

In thy light shall we see light - No man can illuminate his own soul; all understanding must come from above. Here the metaphor is changed, and God is compared to the sun in the firmament of heaven, that gives light to all the planets and their inhabitants. "God said, Let there be light; and there was light; "by that light the eye of man was enabled to behold the various works of God, and the beauties of creation: so, when God speaks light into the dark heart of man, he not only beholds his own deformity and need of the salvation of God, but he beholds the "light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" "God, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." "In thy light shall we see light." This is literally true, both in a spiritual and philosophical sense.

PSALM 36: 10 Oh continue your loving kindness to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.

 Verse 10

O continue thy loving-kindness - Literally, "Draw out thy mercy." The allusion to the spring is still kept up.

Unto them that know thee - To them who acknowledge thee in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

And thy righteousness - That grace which justifies the ungodly, and sanctifies the unholy.

To the upright in heart - לִישָׁרֵי לֵב leishrey leb, to the straight of heart; to those who have but one end in view, and one aim to that end.

This is true of every genuine penitent, and of every true believer.

PSALM 36: 11 Don't let the foot of pride come against me. Don't let the hand of the wicked drive me away.

Verse 11

Let not the foot of pride come against me - Let me not be trampled under foot by proud and haughty men.

Let not the hand of the wicked remove me - תִּנְדְּנֵי tenideni, shake me, or cause me to wander. Both these verses may have immediate respect to the captives in Babylon. The Jews were, when compared with the Babylonians, the people that knew God; for in Jewry was God known, Psa 76:1; and the psalmist prays against the treatment which the Jews had received from the proud and insolent Babylonians during the seventy years of their captivity: "Restore us to our own land; and let not the proud foot or the violent hand ever remove us from our country and its blessings; the temple, and its ordinances."

PSALM 36: 12 There the workers of iniquity are fallen. They are thrust down, and shall not be able to rise.

Verse 12

There are the workers of iniquity fallen - There, in Babylon, are the workers of iniquity fallen, and so cast down that they shall not be able to rise. A prophecy of the destruction of the Babylonish empire by Cyrus. That it was destroyed, is an historical fact; that they were never able to recover their liberty, is also a fact; and that Babylon itself is now blotted out of the map of the universe, so that the site of it is no longer known, is confirmed by every traveler who has passed over those regions.

The word שָׁם sham, There, has been applied by many of the fathers to the pride spoken of in the preceding verse. There, in or by pride, says Augustine, do all sinners perish. There, in heaven, have the evil angels fallen through pride, says St. Jerome. There, in paradise, have our first parents fallen, through pride and disobedience. There, in hell, have the proud and disobedient angels been

precipitated - Eusebius, etc. There, by pride, have the persecutors brought God's judgments upon themselves. See Calmet. But the first interpretation is the best.