

# PSALM 36

## INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 36

*To the chief Musician, [a Psalm] of David, the servant of the Lord*

This title, which the psalmist takes to himself, regards him not only as a creature, every man being the servant of the Lord as such, of right, though not in fact; but as a king, he being a minister of God for good to good men, and for evil to evil men; and also may respect him as a renewed man; and it is here used in opposition to and distinction from the wicked, who are the servants of sin and Satan, of whom he speaks in this psalm. The Syriac and Arabic versions in their titles suggest that this psalm was written when David was persecuted by Saul, and which is the sense of some interpreters; but R. Obadiah thinks Ahithophel is designed by the wicked man in it; and so it was penned on account of Absalom's rebellion.

**Ver. 1.** *The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart*, etc.] Which is represented as a person speaking within him; not that the transgression of the wicked was really in him; sin was in him, and sin of the same kind and nature with the wicked man's; but he taking notice of and considering the wicked man's sinful course of life, and his daring impieties, conceived in his own mind, and concluded from hence,

*[that there is] no fear of God before his eyes*; no reverential affection for him, but enmity to him; no godly filial fear, but at most only a slavish fear, a fear of punishment; no holy and humble fear of him, but pride and wickedness; no fiducial and obediencial fear, but all the reverse; true worship of him, either internally or externally: there can be no fear of God in any unregenerate man's heart, because it is not of nature, but of grace, and is, what is implanted at first conversion; there is in some an appearance of it, where it is not really, whose fear is taught by the precept of men; and in others there may be some awe of the divine Being, and trembling at the thought of a future judgment, arising from the dictates of nature, the light of revelation, and the enjoyment of a religious education; but in some there is no fear of God at all, and they are bold and daring enough to assert it themselves, as the unjust judge did, (~~2104~~ Luke 18:4). Such as the atheist,

the common swearer, the debauchee and epicure, who give up themselves to all manner of wickedness, contemn revelation, despise the word of God, and regard no day nor manner of worship; and this notwithstanding the majesty of God, at whose presence they tremble not, and notwithstanding the goodness of God, which should induce them to fear him, and notwithstanding the judgment of God on others, and even on themselves; (see <sup>248B</sup>Jeremiah 3:8 <sup>223D</sup>Luke 23:40); and notwithstanding the future awful judgment, which they put far away or disbelieve. The Targum is, “transgression saith to the wicked within my heart”; and Jarchi’s note upon the text is this,

“this text is to be transposed thus, it is in my heart, that transgression, which is the evil imagination, says to the wicked man, that there should be no fear of God before his eyes; and the phrase, “in the midst of my heart”, is as if a man should say, so it seems to me.”

The Septuagint version, and those that follow it, render the words thus, “the transgressor said, that he might sin in himself, there is no fear of God before his eyes”. Gussetius <sup>f508</sup> interprets “before his eyes”, before the eyes of God himself, who is so good a Being, that the sinner fears no punishment from him, but will pardon all his sins.

**Ver. 2.** *For he flattereth himself in his own eyes*, etc.] There are many self-flatterers; some on account of their worldly estate, that they are out of the reach of God and men, and regard neither; and that as they have much goods laid up, they shall enjoy them many years, and so never think of dying, nor of another world: others on account of their eternal state, pleasing themselves with their own purity, goodness, and righteousness: some flatter themselves either that their sins are not sins, or they are small ones; or they are no other than what multitudes commit; or they are not seen and known, and that God himself sees them not, or takes no notice of them; and that they shall go on with impunity, sentence against them being not speedily executed; and others that there is no God, will be no judgment, nor future state;

*until his iniquity be found to be hateful*, or, “to find his iniquity and to hate” <sup>f509</sup> that which is good, as the word may be rendered; that is, he flatters himself, or speaks smooth things to himself, and endeavours to work himself up into the belief of the above things; that he may find,

embrace, and indulge his lusts with a quiet conscience, and hate God, good men, and everything that is good; the Targum is,

“that he may find sins and hate doctrine”

or instruction. Jarchi and Aben Ezra interpret the words another way,

“that the holy and blessed God may find out his iniquity to hate him;”

(see <sup><4416></sup>Genesis 44:16), which God may be said to do, when he charges the guilt of sin upon the conscience, and punishes for it; and exposes both the sinner and his sins to the world; thereby testifying his hatred of him and his sins; and which should have been hateful to him, as they are to all good men.

**Ver. 3.** *The words of his mouth [are] iniquity and deceit*, etc.] Not only sinful, but sin itself; his mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, of filthy and unchaste words, of corrupt communication, lying, deceit, and flattery; out of the abundance of the wickedness of his heart his mouth speaketh; and which shows the badness of it, and proves all that is said before of him;

*he hath left off to be wise, [and] to do good*; by which the psalmist seems to intend one that had been a professor of religion, who, besides the light of nature he had acted contrary to, had had the advantage of a divine revelation, and had been enlightened into the knowledge of divine things, and had done many things externally good, particularly acts of beneficence; but now had dropped his profession of religion, denied the truths he had been enlightened into, and ceased from doing good; otherwise a natural man understandeth not; and, though he is wise to do evil, to do good he has no knowledge.

**Ver. 4.** *He deviseth mischief upon his bed*, etc.] He casts about in his mind on his pillow, when at leisure from all employment; and consults and contrives schemes how to compass his lusts, and to do injury to others, without doing which he cannot sleep;

*he setteth himself in a way [that is] not good*, in an evil way, which he chooses and delights in, and determines to continue in, he leaving the paths of righteousness to walk in the ways of darkness:

*he abhorreth not evil*; which is to be abhorred both because of its nature and effects; (see <sup><5129></sup>Romans 12:9); but on the contrary he loves it, takes

pleasure in doing it, and in them that commit it: thus, by his thoughts, words, and actions, he appears to be devoid of the fear of God.

**Ver. 5.** *Thy mercy, O Lord, [is] in the heavens*, etc.] Meaning either the general mercy of God the earth is full of, and extends to all creatures; to which it is owing that wicked men before described are not consumed; and which reaches “up to the heavens” <sup>f510</sup>, as the words are by some rendered, as their sins do; (see <sup><3570></sup>Psalm 57:10); or the special mercy of God, and regards not the objects of it, creatures in heaven; for there at, none there proper objects of mercy; but the seat of it, the heart of God, who is in heaven; or the repository of it, the covenant of grace, which is full of the sure mercies of David; and of mercy there was a most glaring instance, when the son of God was sent down from heaven, to obtain salvation for sinful men; or it may denote the original of it, the heaven, being, as Aben Ezra observes some Jewish interpreters say, the fountain of mercy, and the spring of truth; or the greatness and abundance of it, it being as high as heaven, yea, above it; (see <sup><4931></sup>Psalm 103:11 108:4);

*[and] thy faithfulness [reacheth] unto the clouds*; which lies in the execution of his purposes, whose counsels of old were faithfulness and truth; and in keeping his covenant and promises; he never changes his mind, nor forgets his word; he is a God of truth, and cannot lie; he knows the end from the beginning; no unforeseen event can turn up to hinder the performance of what he has purposed and promised, and he is able to perform; nor does ever any of the good things he has spoken of fail: though his faithfulness sometimes seems to be not only to the clouds, but in them, and out of sight; providences seem to clash with promises, which make unbelief to say, doth his promise fail for evermore? yet, though we believe not, he abides faithful, (<sup><1978></sup>Psalm 77:8) (<sup><5023></sup>2 Timothy 2:13).

**Ver. 6.** *Thy righteousness [is] like the great mountains*, etc.] Or, “the mountains of God”; so called for their excellency, as the cedars of God, (<sup><3800></sup>Psalm 80:10); or, as Gussetius <sup>f511</sup> observes, the greatest and highest mountains, which are here meant, reaching above the clouds and the region of the air, are the pillars of the palace of God, and a part of it; and therefore called his mountains with great propriety, to which his righteousness is compared: that is, either the righteousness of God in the government of the world, which is sometimes like the high mountains, not to be reached and accounted for in the present state of things, though always is, and is immovable as they are; or the righteousness of God, by

which he justifies sinners, which may be said to be as the mountains of God, because of the dignity of his person, who has wrought it out; and because of the clear manifestation of it, the Gospel, and so visible, as high mountains; and because of the immovableness and duration of it;

*thy judgments [are] a great deep*; both in a way of providence, many of them being at present not to be traced, though before long they will be made manifest; and in a way of grace, such as the choice of some, and the leaving of others, the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles; (see <sup><4113></sup>Romans 11:33);

*O Lord, thou preservest man and beast*; in a providential way, upholding each in their being, and supplying them with the necessaries of life: some understand this figuratively, of God's saving Jews and Gentiles, wise and unwise, and particularly those who, through humility and modesty, as Jarchi says, compare themselves to beasts, because of their ignorance and stupidity, (<sup><4110></sup>Proverbs 30:2 <sup><4972></sup>Psalms 73:22).

**Ver. 7.** *How excellent [is] thy lovingkindness, O God*, etc.] Which has appeared to men and not angels, to some and not others; to the chief of sinners, who are by nature children of wrath as others; in choosing, redeeming, and calling them, taking them into his family, and making them heirs of eternal glory; and all this of his sovereign good will and pleasure, there being nothing in them that could move him to it; which lovingkindness was in his heart from everlasting, and will never change in him, nor depart from them; and hence it must be most excellent and precious:

*therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings*; not all men; for all have not faith, only some, to whom it is given to believe, and who know the Lord and his lovingkindness; by which they are induced and encouraged to trust in him, to betake themselves to him for mercy and protection, which they find in him: the allusion is either to the hen that gathers her chickens under her wings, and protects them in time of danger, and so it expresses both the paternal affection of God to his people, and the protection of them; or else to the wings of the cherubim over the mercy seat, between which the Lord sat and communed with his people, and showed mercy and favour to them, which encouraged them to trust in him.

**Ver. 8.** *They shall be abundantly sallied with the fatness of thy house,* etc.] By his “house” is meant the church of God, of his building, and where he dwells; by the fatness of it the provisions there, the word and ordinances, and the blessings of grace which they hold forth; and especially Christ, the fatted calf, the bread of life, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed, and which make a feast of fat things; and these they that trust in the Lord are welcome to eat and drink of abundantly, and to abundant satisfaction; (see <sup><41816></sup>Matthew 5:6) (<sup><49226></sup>Psalm 22:26);

*and thou shall make them drink of the river of thy pleasure;* the love of God, whose streams make glad the city of God; or the fulness of grace, which is in Christ, out of which believers draw with joy, and drink with pleasure; or eternal glory and happiness, enjoyed in the presence of God, in which is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore; a never ceasing torrent of them.

**Ver. 9.** *For with thee [is] the fountain of life,* etc.] Or “lives”<sup>f512</sup>: God himself is the fountain of living waters; this is a reason proving the happiness of those that trust in the Lord, and that they shall enjoy the above things; because with God the object of their trust is the fountain of life; not only of natural life, from whom they have it, and by whom it is supported, but of spiritual life, being quickened by him when dead in sin, by virtue of which they live by faith on Christ, and also of eternal life; and the phrase denotes, that life is originally in God as in its fountain, and that both the fulness of it is with him, and the freeness of it in the communication of it to others, as well as its continuance and duration;

*in thy light shall we see light;* God is light itself, the Father of lights, and the former of it in every sense; in the light of his countenance, and the discoveries of his love, they that trust in him see light, or enjoy comfort; and in the light of his Son Jesus Christ, the sun of righteousness and light of the world, they see the face of God, and enjoy his favour, and behold the glory and excellency of Christ himself; and in the light of the divine Spirit, who is a spirit of wisdom and revelation, they see their sins exceeding sinful, their righteousness as nothing, and a preciousness in the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ; and in the light of the divine word they see the truths of the Gospel in their native simplicity and excellency, and the duties of religion to be performed by them; and in the light of faith, which is the gift of God, they have at least a glimpse of the unseen glories

of the other world; and when the beatific vision shall take place, they shall see no more darkly through a glass, but face to face, even God himself, as he is in Christ.

**Ver. 10.** *O continue thy lovingkindness to them that know thee*, etc.] That is, spiritually and experimentally; and such are they that trust in him and love him: and these are the objects of the love of God; not that their knowledge, faith, or love, are the cause of his love to them; but these things describe and point at manifestly the objects of it; and this request regards the open discovery of it unto them: for the love of God itself always continues, though the manifestations of it are not always the same; and it is for the enlargement and continuance of them the psalmist here prays: for it may be rendered, “draw out thy lovingkindness”<sup>f513</sup>; that is, to a greater length; make a larger and clearer discovery of it, that the height and depth, and length and breadth of it, may be more discerned;

*and thy righteousness unto the upright in heart*; who are sincere and without guile; who have new hearts created and right spirits renewed in them, and have truth in the inward parts; and unto and upon such is the righteousness of Christ, and where it always continues, for it is an everlasting one; but here it means a clearer and constant revelation of it from faith to faith; unless it should rather intend the righteousness of God in protecting his people from the insults of their enemies, and the continual exertion of it for that purpose.

**Ver. 11.** *Let not the foot of pride come against me*, etc.] Meaning some proud enemy, such an one as Ahithophel, of whom R. Obadiah expounds, it, who lifted up his heel against him; and is applicable to any haughty enemy of Christ and his people, and particularly to antichrist, the man of sin, that exalts himself above all that is called God;

*and let not the hand of the wicked remove me*; either from the house of God; or from his throne, that high station and dignity in which he was placed.

**Ver. 12.** *There are the workers, of iniquity fallen*, etc.] Either in the pit they dug for others; or into hell, where they shall be turned at last; (see Gill on “<sup>4985</sup>Psalm 5:5”) and (see Gill on “<sup>4988</sup>Psalm 6:8”);

*they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise*; which will be the case of Babylon when fallen, (<sup>6821</sup>Revelation 18:21), and this distinguishes the falls of the wicked from those of the righteous; for though the righteous fall,

whether into sin, or into any calamity, they rise again; not so the wicked; (see <sup><3574></sup>Psalm 37:24 <sup><3708></sup>Micah 7:8); and thus, as the psalm begins with the transgression of the wicked, it ends with their ruin.