

PSALM 36

Wickedness of Men and Lovingkindness of God

INTRODUCTION.

- A. There are representatives of some three types of Hebrew poetry in these few verses. "Each of the three parts of this psalm corresponds to a different psalm-type; but there is no need to doubt its unity." "The psalmist uses rough poetic form and language to describe evil, and smooth form and beautiful language for the description of God." However, as Ash pointed out, "Despite the diversity, 36:10-12 tie it together by the inclusion of concepts from both preceding sections; and the unity of the psalm can be argued on this basis."
- B. Nowhere else in the Psalms, "Only here is transgression (or rebellion) personified as an evil spirit who speaks in oracular fashion to the heart of wicked man, thereby filling him with evil."
- C. This is a most interesting picture of a man's sins speaking to the sinner and deceiving and corrupting him to the destruction of his soul.
- D. The psalm stands, as stated in the superscription, as having been written by David; and there is no basis whatever in the psalm itself for formulating any kind of argument against the Davidic authorship. The exact time or era in which it might have been composed is unknown.
- E. The psalm may be outlined as follows:
 - I. Psa. 36:1-4 gives the portrait of the wicked man.
 - II. Psa. 36:5-9 paints the Divine goodness.
 - III. Psa. 36:10-12 is the prayer of confidence.

THE TEXT.

- 36:1** Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- 2** For it flatters him in his *own* eyes
Concerning the discovery of his iniquity *and* the hatred *of it*.
- 3** The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;
He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.
- 4** He plans wickedness upon his bed;
He sets himself on a path that is not good;
He does not despise evil.
- 5** Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness *reaches* to the skies.
- 6** Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are *like* a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
- 7** How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
- 8** They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
- 9** For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
- 10** O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You,
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
- 11** Let not the foot of pride come upon me,
And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- 12** There the doers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

COMMENTS.

- A. Portrait of the Wicked Man (36:1-4).
This paragraph was understood by Delitzsch as, "The complaint of David regarding the moral corruption of his generation. These are reflections of the character of the times, and not of particular

circumstances."

The Hebrew text of these four verses is said by many scholars to be damaged and rather ambiguous. Many efforts have been made to solve the translation; but it is probably still doubtful, as indicated by the several marginal alternatives that are suggested in most versions.

The general idea here, however, is certainly clear enough. Sin is personified, and whispers in the heart of the sinner all kinds of inducements for continuation in his evil way. "There is no use to fear God." "There is no danger in disobeying him." "Your sins are not going to be discovered and hated." Such evil counsel is indeed the message of all sin. As DeHoff wrote, "The devil always suggests that there is no danger in disobeying the commandments of God."

[v1] "Says within my heart" The use of the word 'my' here has led some scholars to suppose that David himself was sorely tempted by sin; but this is another one of the difficult problems in the psalm. Paul evidently applied the passage to wicked men generally.

The result of this description of Sin's (Personified) assault upon the human heart invariably produces in the sinner who allows himself thus to be deceived, a status described by the last half of v1, "There is no fear of God before his eyes." The apostle Paul quoted these words in Rom. 3:18, applying them to the judicially hardened generations, both of Jews and Gentiles, who inhabited the earth at the First Advent of our Lord.

Kidner also thought that Paul's quotation of this passage in the Romans context teaches us that, "We should see this portrait as that of Mankind, but for the Grace of God."

[v2] "He flattereth himself in his own eyes" "The sinfulness of the wicked man deludes him into the belief that his wickedness is known to no one but himself." "This self-deception of the wicked is due to his deliberate blindness toward God: he shuts himself up within himself, and, by listening to the smooth words of his own oracle (Sin), persuades himself that he is immune from ultimate disgrace."

[v3] "He hath ceased to be wise and to do good" The wicked man described here is not one who never knew the truth, but he is one who has departed from it; and this corresponds exactly with what Paul taught concerning the whole race of wicked men in Romans 1:28ff.

Psalms 36:3-4 describe the evil character of the deceived sinner: he is a liar; his words are evil; he is a deceiver; he is no longer wise; he no longer does good; even on his bed at night, he is scheming up more wickedness; and he no longer hates evil. Indeed, he loves evil.

[v4] "He sets himself in a position that is not good" "Most diligently he takes up his position in the way that leads in the opposite direction from that which is good; his conscience is deadened against evil; there is not a trace of aversion to it to be found in him; he loves it with all of his soul."

B. The Loving-kindness of God (36:5-9).

[v5] "Thy faithfulness reaches unto the skies" No matter how depraved and wicked men may be, the contrasting glory of God is here set over against it. "God's covenant faithfulness is seen everywhere on earth and also towers into the very heavens." [12]

"Thy faithfulness" "... thy righteousness" "The righteousness of God is here distinguished from his faithfulness. His faithfulness is governed by his promises, and his righteousness is determined by his holiness."

[v6] "Thou preserveth man and beast" "There is not a man nor a beast in the whole earth that is uncared for by the Lord." Jesus himself taught the same thing, declaring with reference to sparrows, "That not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God" (Lk. 12:6).

"Mountains of God ... a great deep" "In these verses, all that is infinite, sublime, and unfathomable in nature is made emblematic of the perfections of Jehovah."

Note also in these verses that:

- (1) God takes care of his Covenant people.
- (2) He cares for man and beast.
- (3) He is the God of "all men," not merely of the Jews.

This is powerfully indicated in the next verse.

[v7] "How precious is thy lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings" The word here rendered God is [~'Elohiym], the God of all men. In passages where His relationship to the Covenant people is considered, Jehovah is used. Although sometimes used interchangeably, there is often a special reason for the choice of one or the other. As Leupold said, "God is here most appropriately designated as [~'Elohiym], because he is regarded as the Father of all the children of men, and not Israel's only."

[v8] "They shall be satisfied ... and ... drink of the river of thy pleasures" "The word here rendered 'pleasures' ('delights' in the KJV) comes from the same root as the word Eden, the Paradise of God." The meaning is that God's people shall have an abundance of all joys and satisfactions, suggestive of the very Garden of Eden itself.

[v9] "In thy light shall we see light" What a shame that the world rushes on in the gathering shadows, still neglecting its only true source of light. Christ is "The Light of the World." In his light, that is, in the light of God's Word, men may see light. Otherwise, they shall continue to stumble and grope their way in the darkness.

"These words reveal a highly spiritual conception of the nature of man's fellowship with God, anticipating some of the loftiest teachings of the New Testament." "In him (Christ) was life, and this life was the light of men" (Jn. 1:4). "This is one of the most spiritual pictures of God in the Psalms."

C. The Concluding Prayer (36:10-12).

This beautiful prayer concludes the psalm.

[v11] "Let not the foot of pride come against me" "This statement is considered as a mark of Davidic authorship, because, 'Every Psalm of David that speaks of danger points to the pride of his enemies as the source of it.'"

[v12] "There are the workers of iniquity fallen" David here seems to see in a kind of vision the overthrow of the wicked. "Whereas the righteous may indeed fall into misfortune and recover themselves through God's grace, the workers of iniquity, when their time comes to fall, will perish."

"There ..." The psalmist here speaks as if he indeed sees the fallen hosts of wickedness. Perhaps those are correct who see this as an example of, "The man of faith who endures as seeing the things that are invisible."