



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

## Psalm 36

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# Introduction

- This psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord*
- The title of the psalm indicates that it was directed toward the Chief Musician, whom some suppose to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph
- It was written by David
- *the servant of the Lord*, is mentioned only here and in Psalm 18
- There is no known reason, but it is an honor, to the greatest of men, to be the servants of the great God

# Introduction



- The occasion on which the psalm was composed is not known
- There is nothing in the title to indicate this, or in the psalm itself
- Some think it was written probably when David was persecuted by Saul or by Absalom
- This psalm consists of three defined verses of nearly equal length
- The first portrays the wicked man who has reached the lowest condition of sinfulness
- The second exalts the goodness and justice of God
- The third is a prayer asking God for deliverance from the wicked





# Introduction

- This Psalm presents two contrasted pictures
- One of the evil attitude and conduct of the man who has made deliberate choice of evil
- The other of the universal and infinite lovingkindness of God
- From the prevailing wickedness around him (to which he is in danger of falling a victim, Psalm 36:11), the Psalmist turns for relief and comfort to contemplate the goodness of God
- The wicked men may deny God's Providence and challenge His judgements, but to the eye of faith, His goodness is supreme, and His justice righteousness will ultimately be triumphant



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4
- A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9
- A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12

# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- As the Psalmist reflects on the conduct of the wicked man, it becomes clear to him that denying God is the guiding principle of his life
- When David considers the great transgressions of ungodly men, he concludes, within himself, that they have cast off all fear of and belief in God
- If the wicked feared God, he would not talk and act so carelessly as he does
- He would not or dare to break the laws of God, disobey and violate His commandments



# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- *“You will know them by their fruits.”* (Matthew 7:16) the fruits of unholiness is clear evidence of wickedness
- Some translation says, *within his heart* and *not within my heart*
- Which may be interpreted that sin is alive as the evil counsellor sitting in the heart of the wicked to suggest evil thoughts
- David tells us the two primary roots of sin, one is in the will, by which we determine on committing sin; the other is in the understanding, that does not consider the fear of the Lord forbidding sin
- The wicked consented in his heart to sin because in his heart he did not think of the fear of the Lord, who sees everything

# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- The wicked, in his deceit, does not only deceive others, but he deceives himself as well
- And *flatters himself* by himself, concerning *his iniquity* and hatred
- He twists the facts, as his iniquity is not hateful in his own eyes, for he covers it with a garment of virtue
- He finds excuses for himself in all things, and flatters himself by calling his transgressions by good and kind names, mixing vanity with truth, and iniquity with virtue
- He only hates the discovery of his guilt



# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- He *flatters himself* that he will conceal his sin from God, so that God will not discover it to hate it
- The wicked deceives himself with vain and false beliefs that God does not notice or mind his sins, or that He will not punish them
- The wicked man lowers his opinion and view of God and raises his assessment of himself
- He thinks of himself much more highly than he should both in regard to his sins (*his iniquity*) and his prejudices (*hates*)
- We usually think of *flattery* as coming from others, but we are entirely able to tell ourselves that we are better than we actually are

# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- From the secret motivations of sin, David's description of the ungodly passes on to its matters in words and deeds
- There was a time when he occasionally acted wisely and did what was right
- But that time is gone by
- Now he is consistently wicked
- It is an awful picture of wickedness of a man abandoning himself without check or remorse to the motivation of his own evil heart
- He goes from bad to worse
- He refrains from being reasonable or understanding

# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- He has no more intention to do good
- Here, the psalmist proclaims the full responsibility of the wicked not to practice goodness
- He cannot offer ignorance as an excuse, because it was voluntary
- Those who fear God do not create excuses, or go about to boast of their wickedness, if they sin
- He describes unjust acts, then sinful words, and now in verse 4 evil thoughts and affections



# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- It is from the heart, as we read in the Gospel, that bad words and actions spring, *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,”* (Matthew 15:19)
- It is from the bad acts and words that we see and hear that we know the bad thoughts and desires that we can neither see nor hear
- The bad actions and words were not produced suddenly, without premeditation, but planned long before *on his bed*
- The wicked man is not merely negatively bad; he intentionally chooses a path of life that is evil

# A Description of the Character of the Wicked 36:1-4



- The wicked chose to follow every bad counsel
- The evil person is inventing ways to do evil, in contrast to the godly who, *“walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.”* (Psalm 1:1-2)
- *He sets himself in a way that is not good*, Sin is found in what we don't do as well as in what we do, *“who knows to do good and does not, to him it is sin.”* (James 4:17)
- *He does not abhor evil*, But on the contrary, takes pleasure in it, and is glad to see others as bad as himself

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- The psalmist now passes to another part of the Psalm, and shows that, however great the wickedness and evil of some, still the goodness of God, which consists of His justice and His mercy, is greater
- However great, deep, and strong are our troubles, God's mercies will remain higher, greater, and deeper
- Who can measure the heavens?
- How can we then measure God's mercy?
- Far above all comprehension is the truth and faithfulness of God



# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- David's enemies might have been cruel and deceitful, but God is infinite in mercy and faithfulness, and in righteousness and lovingkindness
- Therefore, though David may have no hope in his enemies, yet he trust in the Lord
- *Mercy...faithfulness...righteousness...judgments*, David can only describe these attributes of God with the biggest things he can think of – the *heavens*, the *clouds* that fill the sky, the *great mountains*, and the *great deep* of the sea

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- By all these images of the height and the depth of the divine mercy and justice, as well as of His truth and judgments, we are given to understand that, as our physical eyes cannot see or gaze at those things above the clouds or below the earth, no more can we understand the greatness of the justice and of the mercy of God
- *man and beast*, Some understand this figuratively, of God's saving Jews and Gentiles, wise and unwise, and men who, like beasts, are led by their sensuality only—whose malice he had already explained

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- Truly infinite and astonishing is the mercy and goodness of God, who, with the greatest justice, can destroy the wicked and the blasphemer
- Yet, at the very time that they are blaspheming and disobeying His commandments, He is actually nourishing them and making His sun to shine on them and watering their fields with His rain from heaven
- According to St. Augustine, “the saints enjoy the heavenly and not the earthly mercy, the eternal, and not the temporal: Let us then look up to the mercy, to the heavenly mercy.”



# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- God's lovingkindness and faithfulness cannot be measured
- *How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God*, The sense is, though all His attributes are glorious and wonderful, yet, above all, His mercy is most marvelous, wonderful, or *precious* because it is the most necessary and beneficial unto us, sinful men
- *the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings*, The merciful God is a place of rest and protection for the people of God
- Having spoken of God's mercy to the wicked and the carnal, whom he described as beasts, he now speaks of His mercy towards the godly and the spiritual, called by him *the children of men*

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- There are two main ways that commentators understand the figure *shadow of Your wings*
- Some take it to mean the wings of the cherubim represented in His tabernacle and later the temple
- Cherubim wings were depicted on the lid of the ark of the covenant, which was the representation of God's throne
- Others take it in the sense that a hen covers her young chicks under her wings to protect, hide, and shelter them
- Our Lord Jesus Christ used this term in His talk about Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37), in which He, by His great humility and love, revealed His compassion on His children, and His longing for their salvation



# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- “Attend, my Beloved, First, he spoke of “man and beast,” then of “the children of men;” as though “men” were one, “the children of men” other. Sometimes in Scripture children of men is said generally of all men, sometimes in some proper manner, with some proper signification, so that not all men are understood; chiefly when there is a distinction ... Separate from whom? Not only from beasts, but also from men, who seek from God the saving of beasts, and desire this as a great thing. Who then are the children of men? Those who put their trust under the shadow of His wings. For those men together with beasts rejoice in possession, but the children of men rejoice in hope: those follow after present goods with beasts, these hope for future goods with Angels.” St. Augustine



# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- God cares for and protects those who trust in Him as a gracious and honorable host would for anyone in his *house*
- By *Your house* is meant the church where He dwells
- *They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,* By His word and through the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the fatted calf, the bread of life, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed
- Those who trust in the Lord are welcome to eat and drink of to abundant satisfaction; *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”* (Matthew 5:6); *“The poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD.”* (Psalm 22:26)

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- We are never satisfied in this life
- The gains of the world may be piled up, but never satisfy, *“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.”* (Isaiah 55:2)
- *from the river of Your pleasures*, Which denote both their plenty, and their constancy and perpetuity
- It is the love 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

# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- The satisfaction and *pleasures* found in God are connected to *life* and *light*
- They heal and build, giving *life*; they are full of the *light* of truth and goodness
- God is the source of life and light
- From Him springs all that constitutes life, physical and spiritual (Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13)
- From Him proceeds all that makes up true happiness (Psalm 4:6)
- He *has life in Himself*, (John 5:26)



# A Description of the Mercy of God 36:5-9



- He *is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all* (1 John 1:5)
- The Son is *the Light of the world* (John 8:12); Jesus *was the true Light which gives light to every man* (John 1:9)
- St. John Chrysostom says, “He lights all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift.”

# A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12



- Here begins the third section of the Psalm which is David' prayer asking God for deliverance from the wicked
- The psalmist asks that God will be in the future such as He has been in the past - that He will prolong, or *continue Your lovingkindness* to His faithful servants, dealing with them as He has previously dealt with them (verses 5,7), mercifully, graciously, and lovingly
- *to the upright in heart*, These great gifts, of which he had been speaking, belong to the just alone, designated by him as the *children of men*, to distinguish them from the wicked, whom he called *beasts*

# A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12



- Note the parallelism between *those who know You* and *the upright in heart*
- David naturally thought that those who genuinely knew God would be *upright in heart*
- St. Augustine says, “As I have said, Those are of a right heart who follow in this life the Will of God.”
- David earlier praised God as the one who protects and blesses His people (v. 7)
- Now David prayed that God would fulfill this aspect of His character, protecting His servant against both the *foot* and the *hand of the wicked*



# A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12



- The psalmist is himself in danger of falling a victim to the ruthless oppressors there described
- So, he prays that God will not allow that he be trampled under foot by proud oppressors
- Pride is the devil's sin
- Good men may well be afraid of proud men, for the serpent's seed will never cease to, "*bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15)
- The "*hand*" is the instrument by which we accomplish anything, and the reference here is to the efforts which the wicked might make to destroy him

# A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12



- St. Augustine has a different explanation, he says, “Let not the foot of pride come to me. Let me not have the manner, the affectation of pride; ‘and let not the hand of the sinner move me;’ let not the sinner have any influence over me that may bring me to sin; and thus, through my own fault, or through the temptation of others, be brought down from my position, and miserably fall.”
- The Psalm ends with a confirmation that the workers of iniquity, who persist on their evil ways, will fall under curse; into the same spot where they intended for the children of God to fall into

# A Prayer to Experience the Mercy of God 36:10-12



- They are *fallen*, and so much so that they *are not able to rise*
- Unlike the righteous who may fall seven times yet rise up again (Proverbs 24:16)
- There is some emphasis on the word *there* in this phrase
- Some think it refers to the *pride* mentioned in the previous verse, and others to the place where the *workers of iniquity* practiced their sin
- The wicked fall and are not able to rise again; yet, the doors or repentance will remain open
- As according to St. Augustine, “If you have fallen down, get up; If you are up, stand aright; and if you are sitting, beware of evil”





# Discussion

- How are the wicked described in this Psalm?
- What are the two contrasts laid out in the Psalm?
- How are the godly described in verses 7 through 9?
- What happens to the wicked according to this Psalm?



# Discussion

- What evidence do you see that the human heart is corrupt? What are some consequences of a corrupt heart?
- Describe the love that stems from God's heart.