

# PSALMS

## Chapter 36

**Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. <sup>2</sup>For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.<sup>3</sup>The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good.<sup>4</sup>He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil. <sup>5</sup>Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. <sup>6</sup>Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. <sup>7</sup>How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. <sup>8</sup>They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. <sup>9</sup>For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. <sup>10</sup>Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart! <sup>11</sup>Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. <sup>12</sup>There the evildoers lie fallen; they are thrust down, unable to rise.**

**Ps 36** A prayer for God's unfailing protection, as the psalmist reflects on the godlessness of the wicked and the goodness of God. In Jewish practice, vv. 7–10 form part of the morning prayer. (CSB)

*choirmaster.* A common superscription (55 psalms). *servant of the LORD.* David serves in an official capacity as a leader and instructor of the people. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, way of the wicked; vv 5–6, the Lord's steadfast love; vv 7–9, blessings of His steadfast love; vv 10–12, end of evildoers. (TLSB)

*choirmaster.* Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the director of music should collect the psalm for Israel's worship services or that the leader of the Levitical choir should speak this psalm (cf 1Ch 23:5, 30; 25; Ne 11:17). (TLSB p. 993)

**36:1–4** The foolish and haughty godlessness of the wicked. (CSB)

**36:1** *oracle.* Usually reserved for words of revelation from God, such as those spoken by the prophets (see, e.g., Nu 23:7; Isa 13:1; Jer 23:33–38; Eze 12:10). Here reference is to an insight, perhaps coming like a flash, into the true character of the wicked. (CSB)

This revelation (oracle) will focus on the “transgression” of the “wicked.” The “wicked” (or ungodly s.v. Ps. 1:1) refers to people who are unbelievers. They are guilty before God because they have never repented or sought forgiveness; they are deserving of punishment. (A Commentary of the Psalms – Ross)

*transgression* – The English word “transgression” means “passing over a boundary”; but the idea of “rebellion” adds the idea of willful and aggressive action to the crossing over. Unbelievers live their lives in rebellion to God and his will – they would deny this, or deny God, but the fact remains that people who choose not to obey God are rebellious. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*the wicked* – David explains the enormity of iniquity. (TLSB)

*no fear of God* – See 55:19. They take no account of his all-seeing eye, his righteous judgment and his power to deal with them. For Paul’s use of this verse see Ro 3:18. (CSB)

As complacency grows, the wicked lose all consideration of God; they become “practical atheists,” living their lives as if there were no God. This is the belief at the core of all sin; it clears the way for people to do what they want, no matter what the effects might be on others. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

The wicked have totally lost the restraining dread of God’s power, which curbs wickedness (cf Rm 3:18). Luther translates as “I am speaking from deepest conviction about the ungodly that there is no fear of God before their eyes.” (TLSB)

**36:2** *flatters himself* – Not in self-righteousness but out of the smug, conceited notion that he is accountable to no one. (CSB)

Hebrew “makes smooth.” The wicked have the illusion that their sin is not immediately found out or punished by God. In their warped thinking, they justify their iniquity, not considering God’s righteous punishment. (TLSB)

He justifies himself in all things to soothe his conscience, so that he will not see what an unpleasant character he is. God-fearing people see their own sins and deal with them correctly, but this a type of person conceals sin. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**36:3** *words of his mouth* – The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword. Perhaps appeals to God against those who maliciously wield the tongue are frequent in the Psalms because only in God’s courtroom can a person experience redress for such attacks. (CSB)

Here the evil begins to affect other people; no longer is it a matter of convincing himself he is a good person. Rather, his words betray him. The first description of what he says is that it is painful or troubling “evil” (s.v. Ps. 28:3), that is, evil that produces sorrow and trouble. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*are trouble and deceit* – Luther: “A sham friend is more hateful than an open enemy” (AE 10:170). Cf 41:9; 55:13. (TLSB)

What they say is deceptive – it cannot be believed. The two words could be taken together, “deceitful acts that cause trouble.” This would explain the cause of the pain and trouble in their words – they deceive people. In the world of unbelievers, now as well as then, whether business,, law, politics, education or even religion, lies predominate and justified by the liars if they accomplish their goal. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*ceased to act wisely* – The word “act prudently” means to be wise, have insight or understanding, or to show good skill. They may have skill or wisdom in worldly matters, but not in doing what is right. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*do good* – A symmetrical development of the theme “good” dominates the stanza: Because the Lord is good, those who trust in him will lack nothing good; but in order to experience good days, they must shun evil and do good. (CSB)

**36:4** *on his bed* – When one’s thoughts are free to range, and to set the course for the activities of the day. The wicked do not meditate on God’s law “day and night” (1:2; see 119:55), or let a godly heart instruct them at night (see 16:7), or at night commune with God (see 42:8), think of him (see 63:6) and reflect on his promises (see 119:148). (CSB)

Since the fall, sin is our most basic impulse. The wicked lie awake at night, unable to rest because they just have to develop some evil scheme. (In contrast, the righteous meditate on God’s Word both day and night. The heart and mind determine the life, as Jesus would teach (cf Mt 12:33–37; Mk 7:21–23). Augustine: “Our bed is our heart: there we suffer the tossing of an evil conscience; and there we rest when our conscience is good” (NPNF 1 8:87). (TLSB)

*sets himself in a way that is not good* – The heart of the problem is the corrupt nature of the sinner. The defiant sinner has no reverence for the majesty of God and no fear of his judgment. Romans 8:7 states, “*The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law.*” The sinner either refuses to admit that his sin is wrong, or brazenly ignores God’s threats of judgment. Were it not for the grace of God, these verses would be a description of us all. (PBC)

**36:5–9** The goodness of the Lord—his benevolence toward all his creatures (see 33:4–5). (CSB)

**36:5-6** God’s attributes are revealed in His actions: steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, judgment, and salvation extended to all creation, for the sake of His Son (cf 33:5; 89:14; 97:2; Hos 2:19–20; Is 9:7; Jer 9:24). Augustine: “The Mercy [of God] which You give to Your Saints, is Heavenly, not earthly; is Eternal, not temporal.... For who could know the Heavenly Mercy of God, unless God should declare it unto men?” (NPNF 1 8:88). (TLSB)

Believers cannot put forth their virtues as contrast to the wickedness of unbelievers, for they do many of the same things. The difference is the life they enjoy because they have entered into covenant with the Lord. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**36:5** *love ... faithfulness* – That is, love-and-faithfulness (as in 57:3; 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14; 115:1; 138:2; Pr 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28). (CSB)

The “loyal love” (s.v. Ps. 23:6) is the faithful covenant love that God has for his own – he has made a covenant with his people and is faithful to keep it because he loves them. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*reaches to the heavens ... to the skies* – Encompasses all the realms of creaturely existence (see 57:10; 108:4). (CSB)

How sharply this beautiful description of God’s love contrasts with the black picture of human sinfulness which we find in verses 1-4. (PBC)

The fact that the Lord is seated enthroned in the heavens may have influenced the choice of the description of the attributes, but the main point is that his faithful love is unsearchable, beyond comprehension, unlimited. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**36:6** *righteousness ... judgments* – That is, righteousness-and-justice (as in 33:5; 89:14; 97:2; Hos 2:19; see also Isa 9:7; 33:5; Jer 9:24). (CSB)

The word “righteousness” (s.v. Ps.1:5) refers to that which conforms to the standard, what is right. God, of course, is the standard, and so whatever he does is right. Parallel to this is the word “judgments” (s.v. Ps. 9:4), which refers to the decisions that God makes. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*mountains of God* – As high as the mountains, as deep as the sea. (CSB)

Hills of Zion. (TLSB)

Great mountains are immovable and inflexible objects, conspicuous and evident to all, and as natural boundaries not easily surmounted. This truth is at the heart of divine revelation: God’s righteousness is the obvious and certain standard of all his works. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*man and beast* – Augustine: “Is not the saving of beasts also from God? For He who made man, made also beasts; He made both, saves both; but the saving of beasts is temporal” (NPNF 1 8:88–89). Cf Gn 7:22–23; LC II 13–14. (TLSB)

**36:7** *steadfast love* – The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

God’s love richly provides for all the physical and spiritual needs of the whole human race. These verses point beyond earthly blessings to the new heavens and the new earth where God’s people will live in the light of God. They will drink of the waters of life and eat of the tree of life. Read Revelation 22:1-5 for a beautiful elaboration of these verses. (PBC)

Coming back to the “steadfast love” of God, is as though the writer said: All these divine attributes that we have listed add up to this one, which he now designates as “precious” in the eyes of God’s children. The conviction that it exists induces “the children of men, everywhere “to take refuge” under the wings of God. (Leupold)

*shadow of your wings* – Metaphor for the protective outreach of God’s power. (CSB)

Note 17:8-9 TLSB – David uses a pair of vivid images as he begs for protection from his enemies. *apple of Your eye*. Eye’s pupil. *shadow of Your wings*. The cherubim of God’s throne were winged (Ex 25:20). A mother hen hides her chicks under her wings to protect them. Cf Lk 13:34; see notes, 57:1; Ezk 10:1.

**36:8** *feast ... drink*. Life-giving food and water.

Abundance of God’s creation (food and drink). At the tabernacle, God’s children feasted on the sacrifices. (TLSB)

TLSB pp. 170-171 Imagine the combination of a church, a slaughterhouse, and an open-air kitchen and you will begin to form a picture of the tabernacle. Each day, the priests sacrificed animals and grain offerings. On feast days, they made more extensive sacrifices based on the laws God gave Moses. When people brought their personal sacrifices to the Lord, the priests offered these as well.

The offerings we make today—bills and coins—may seem vastly different from the bloody sacrifices of the OT. However, in at least one way, our offerings and the offerings of the OT worked the same: both kinds of offerings have fed the Lord’s ministers and their families.

### **The Portion of the Priests and Levites**

During the wilderness wanderings, the Lord commanded that the priests and Levites should receive a tithe of all the offerings in Israel (Nu 18:8–32). The priests sacrificed a portion of this tithe by burning it or presenting it before the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The remainder of the meat or grain might feed the priests, the Levites, and their families.

When Israel settled in the Promised Land, the priests and Levites did not receive a major land grant like the other tribes. They made their living by teaching and guiding God’s people (cf Dt 17:8–13; Jsh 21; 2Ch 15:3; 17:7–9). Leviticus provides the details about what portions of the sacrifices belonged to the priests. They did not eat any of the burnt offerings, but they were allowed to eat a portion of most other offerings. Here are examples (see also note, 2:3):

- Grain offering—Lv 2:3, 10; 6:16, 18, 23
- Peace offering—Lv 7:14–21, 28–38
- Sin offering—Lv 6:26, 29–30
- Guilt offering—Lv 7:6–10
- Showbread—Lv 24:9

Notes 2:3 – TLSB – After the memorial portion was offered to God and burned on the altar (v 2), the remaining portion of the grain was dedicated to God, consecrated, and given to the priests as food. *most holy*. Offerings presented to the Lord became “most holy” and provided sustenance for His priests. Only the priests were allowed to eat “most holy” food, and only in the sanctuary (courtyard of the tent of meeting).

*house*. Here, God’s whole estate or realm—i.e., the earth, from which springs the abundance of food for all living things. (CSB)

This points beyond earthly blessings to the new heaven and the new earth where God’s people will live in the light of the God. They will drink of the waters of life and eat of the tree of life. Read Revelation 22:1-5 for a beautiful elaboration of these verses. (PBC)

*river*. † The “channel” (Job 38:25) by which God brings forth the rain out of his “storehouses” (33:7; see Job 38:8–11, 22, 37; Jer 10:13) in his “upper chambers” (104:13; see 65:9; Isa 30:25 and the references to “blessings” from heaven in Ge 49:25; Dt 33:23). This vivid imagery, depicting God’s control over, and gift of, the waters from heaven, which feed the rivers and streams of earth to give life and health wherever they flow, may also be related to the symbol of “the river of the water of life” that flows from the temple of God (Rev 22:1–2; see also Eze 47:1–12). (CSB)

*of delights*. Furnishing many sources of joy. (CSB)

**36:9** The climax and summation of vv. 5–9. (CSB)

*fountain of life*. See Jer 2:13; 17:13. Ultimately, for sinners, God provides the water of life through Jesus Christ (Jn 4:10, 14). (CSB)

God and His Word are compared to refreshing waters (Pr 18:4; Is 55:1). God gives life in both the temporal and eternal realms. Ultimately, for sinners, God provides the water of life through Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

Much in the spirit of Psalm 1, the happy lot of those who have taken refuge in Him. (Leupold)

*your light.* Often symbolizes well-being or life and salvation. (CSB)

Apart from Him, we are in darkness. Knowing Him brings enlightenment and joy. (TLSB)

*see.* Experience, have, enjoy, as in 16:10; 27:13; 34:8, 12; 49:9, 19; 89:48; 90:15; 106:5 (“enjoy”); Job 9:25 (“glimpse”); 42:5; Ecc 1:16 (“experienced”); 3:13 (“find”); 6:6 (“enjoy”); 8:16; Isa 53:10; La 3:1. (CSB)

*light.* Life in its fullness as it was created to be. For the association of light with life see 49:19; 56:13; Job 3:20; 33:30; Isa 53:11. (CSB)

**36:10–11** The prayer: Your “love” (v. 5) and “righteousness” (v. 6), which you display in all creation—show these to all who know (acknowledge) you and are upright (the people of God). But keep the wicked, “foot” and “hand,” from success against me. (CSB)

Closing prayer asking for God’s mercy and protection. (TLSB)

After contrasting God’s love with human sinfulness, David prays that God will continue to display his love to his people and to protect them against the wicked. The last verse extends to the godly and a final warning to the wicked. (PBC)

Our best defense against violence is still prayer. (Leupold)

**36:10** *love.* The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

*up-right of heart* – Sincere. (TLSB)

**36:11** *proud.* Those who refuse to live in humble reliance on the Lord. They arrogantly try to make their way in the world either as a law to themselves or by relying on false gods. Hence “the proud” is often equivalent to “the wicked.” (CSB)

People who try to make their way in the world either as a law to themselves (cf 10:2–11; 31:18; 73:6) or by relying on false gods (Jer 13:9–10). (TLSB)

FOOT...HAND – Luther: “The foot of pride is the father of heretics, schismatics, sects, rebels, and apostates. Then follows the *hand*, the works and merits of their own life which they set up for themselves as righteousness” (AE 10:172). (TLSB)

**36:12** Confidence (see note on 3:8 – Here David’s confidence becomes a testimony to God’s people.). (CSB)

*lie fallen.* Perhaps in death – Referring to death.). (CSB)

Success and prosperity of the ungodly are fleeting. This psalm ends with the nature and ultimate destiny of wickedness. God has already overthrown all evil and wickedness through His Son, our Savior. (TLSB)

**Ps 36** • O heavenly Father, we rely on Your grace and protection in the midst of sin and the wicked works of those who test our faith. Your Word is truth. Do not allow courage to build in the hearts of Your enemies, who despise Your Word and Your Son. Do not let them proudly boast, “Where is your God?” Answer, we pray, those who oppress Your Holy Word. Amen. (TLSB)