

# Psalm 36

- in your light we see light -

**Author: Evert Jan Hempenius**

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## Introduction

- ❖ Many are longing for true love, and faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. God will provide in a world full of deceit, unfaithfulness, unrighteousness, and injustice.
- ❖ This Psalm will help us to pray to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Psalms. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## Context

- ❖ The historical context of Psalm 36 is not known. The only inference to personal circumstances is found in verse 11, where the poet points to the proud and to the wicked, who try to drive him away.
- ❖ The Book of Psalms belongs to the Wisdom literature. Psalm 36 is part of the first book of Psalms (Psalm 1-41). Especially Psalm 1, Psalm 9-10, Psalm 37 and Psalm 36 teach about the wicked and their schemes. The proximity of Psalm 37 is interesting.

## Form and structure

- ❖ Psalm 36 consists of three parts.
  - The first part is about the sinfulness of the wicked.

- In contrast, the second part describes the faithfulness of the LORD. This is the basis for the prayer of protection against the wicked.
- The third and concluding part, verse 12, returns to the wicked and their finale fate.
- ❖ The Psalm contains wisdom, praise, and prayer.
  - The translation of verse 1 is difficult. (See Technical, hermeneutical en historical notes.)

<i>Superscription:</i>	For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD.
The present situation of the wicked	
<i>Introduction (verse 1a)</i>	1 An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:
<i>The wicked (verse 1b-4)</i>	<p>There is no fear of God before his eyes.</p> <p>2 For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.</p> <p>3 The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good.</p> <p>4 Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.</p>
Prayer	
<i>Praises (verse 5-9)</i>	<p>5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.</p> <p>6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.</p> <p>O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.</p> <p>7 How priceless is your unfailing love!</p> <p>Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.</p> <p>8 They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.</p> <p>9 For with you is the fountain of life;</p>

	in your light we see light.
<i>Request (verse 10, 11)</i>	10 Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.  11 May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
The end of the wicked	
<i>Result: (verse 12)</i>	12 See how the evildoers lie fallen— thrown down, not able to rise!

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ The translation of verse 1 is difficult as a comparison of the NIV and the ESV will show.

NIV	ESV
An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:  There is no fear of God before his eyes.	Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart;  there is no fear of God before his eyes.

- “My heart” is preferred.
- “נְאֻם־פִּי־עַ” =
  - NIV: “An oracle ... concerning the sinfulness.”
    - An oracle = “נְאֻם” = an almost completely fixed technical expression introducing prophetic oracles and in connection with other expressions.<sup>1</sup> Also: originally **whispering** > **announcement**.<sup>2</sup>
  - ESV: “Transgression speaks”
    - This translation is also found in “1. utterance, declaration, revelation, of prophet in ecstatic state; Ps 36:2 **transgression personified, speaking with prophetic voice**.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 657).

<sup>2</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 657).

<sup>3</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 610); Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. electronic ed., p. 657); Briggs, C. A., & Briggs, E. G. (1969, p. 315, 316).

- In this case, the problem of “in his heart” remains.

### Parallellismus membrorum

- ❖ Parallellismus membrorum is a special feature of Biblical literature, especially of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, i.e. The Book of Job, Psalms and Proverbs. It “is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose. It can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.”<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ There are three kinds of parallelism:
  - Synonymous parallelism.
    - Two (three) lines express the same thought. Verse 11 is an example:
      1. May            the foot        of the proud        not come against me.
      2. (may) nor    the hand        of the wicked       drive me away.
      - See also verse 5, 6.
    - The two lines can explain each others, such as the lines of verse 10:
      1. Continue        your love                    to those who know you
      2. (Continue)     your righteousness        to the upright in heart.
      - Love and righteousness compliment each other.
      - “Those who know you” and “the upright in heart” explain each other.
  - Syntactical parallelism
    - The second line completes the first line, as is found in verse 7b:
      1. Both high and low among men
      2. find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
    - The second line gives the reason for the first line (verse 8):
      1. They feast on the abundance of your house;
      2. you give them drink from your river of delights.
    - A special case is the Concluding form. Two lines express the same thought, the third line is a conclusion.
  - Antithetical parallelism
    - This type is not found in Psalm 36.

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<sup>4</sup> See for more information: Berlin, A. (1992). *Parallelism*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.)(Vol. 5, p. 155).

## Exposition

### Verse 1a

- ❖ See technical, hermeneutical and historical notes.

### Verse 1b-4 *The present situation of the wicked*

- ❖ The description of the wicked is from the perspective of the righteousness.
  - Not all ungodly people are wicked:  
“(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)(Rom 2:14, 15)
- ❖ Briggs and Briggs explain: “Transgression has taken the place of God and is become the god of this wicked man. He ignores God, can no longer see Him as present; for he is so absorbed in the presence of transgression and the experience of its suggestions.”<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ He has “**no fear of God.**”
  - He doesn’t fear any judgment.
    - “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘**Don’t you fear God,**’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve’” (Lk 23:39-41).
    - “‘So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal 3:5).
    - “In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (Ps 10:4).
    - “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God. They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good’” (Ps 14:1).
    - Calvin comments: “The ungodly do not acknowledge that it is in God they live, move, and have their being, but rather imagine that they are sustained by their own power.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Briggs, C. A., & Briggs, E. G. (1969, p. 316).

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, J., & Anderson, J. (2010, Vol. 2, p. 12).

- These words are quoted in a compilation of citations by the Apostle Paul:
  - **“As it is written:**
    - ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’
    - ‘Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.’
    - ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’
    - ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’
    - ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.’
    - ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’ (Rm 3:10-18).

❖ **“For in his own eyes he flatters himself”**

- “He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (Ps 10:3-4).
- “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom 1:29-32).’
- Batcher and Reyburn comment: “In verse 2 *he flatters himself in his own eyes* means ‘he thinks highly of himself.’ But the subject of the verb could be *transgression* of verse 1, and so the meaning would be (as NJV has it) “its speech is seductive to him”; or else “For rebellion flatters him (and blinds him).” *Flatters himself* may sometimes be rendered “he thinks in his heart what a great chief he is” or “he speaks beautiful words about himself.”<sup>7</sup>
- “The general idea of the verse is that the godless person deludes himself in believing that God will neither find out his sin or hate it (or him).”<sup>8</sup>

❖ **“The words of his mouth.”** See also Psalm 5:9.

- “What a wicked person says harms others (*mischief*) and is untrue (*deceit*); see comments on these terms in 5:6b; 10:7. As noted elsewhere, *mischief* in English is not adequate as a description of something that is wrong or harmful to others. *The*

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<sup>7</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 343).

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, A. A. (1977, Vol 1. 287).

words of his mouth may require shifting into an adverbial clause; for example, 'When he speaks, his words are evil.'<sup>9</sup>

- Compare Psalm 10:6, 7: "He says to himself, 'Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble.' His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue."
- "wicked" = "רָעָה": deception, nothingness.<sup>10</sup>
- "deceitful" = "מְרִירָה": 1. trick, fraud.<sup>11</sup>

❖ "He commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong."

- "The evil man is further portrayed in verse 4 as one who makes evil plans (*plots mischief*), who 'takes his stand on a way that isn't good,' that is, whose conduct is always evil (line b), and as one who *spurns not evil* (line c). *He plots mischief* may sometimes be rendered 'The things he thinks about doing are evil' or 'He thinks of evil things to do.' The clause *while on his bed* in line a refers to his time of leisure, or rest. Line b is taken by Dahood to mean "the path of crime," that is, active evil and not just the passive avoidance of good. (...) In some languages it will be more natural to say, for example, 'he always accepts to do evil deeds' or 'he always says "Yes" to evil.'<sup>12</sup>

Verse 5-9 *The praises of God*

- ❖ There is a sharp contrast with the preceding verses.
- ❖ There are three themes in this part of the Psalm:

The attributes of the Lord	5	Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.
	6	Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.
The protection given by the Lord		O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.
	7	How priceless is your unfailing love!

<sup>9</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 344).

<sup>10</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 22).

<sup>11</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 636).

<sup>12</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 344).

	Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
The joy of the people of the Lord	8 They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.  9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

- ❖ In this “hymn of praise to God’s goodness (verses 5–9), **the four basic perfections** of Yahweh as the God of Israel are mentioned explicitly: *steadfast love*; *faithfulness*, that is, keeping; *righteousness*; and *judgments*.”<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ “Love” and “faithfulness” are like the two sides of the same coin.
  - Love / steadfast love (ESV) = “**אֱמוּנָה**”: **faithfulness, goodness, graciousness**.<sup>14</sup>
    - The love of God is the central attribute of God in this Psalm: verse 5, 7, 10.
  - Faithfulness = “**אֱמֻנָה**”: 2. **trustworthiness, faithfulness**.<sup>15</sup>
    - The comparison with the heavens and the sky is also used in Psalm 52:1, 57:10, 103:11. **The writer is impressed by the love and faithfulness of God.**
    - Also: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9).
    - *Graciousness (love) cannot be separated from faithfulness. In that case, it will turn out to be meaningless.*
  - The individual words “love,” “unfailing love,” “loving-kindness,” and “truth,” “faithfulness,” or the phrase “love and truth” refers to God’s constancy and fidelity in love promised to his covenantal people at Sinai. The one word defines the other, and the phrase could well be considered a hendiadys: “faithful love.”<sup>16</sup>
  - “The thought is that his qualities are beyond measuring, without any limits; they cover the whole universe. If the imagery of love having physical extension can be used, it may be possible to say, for example, **‘you love in such a great way it is like the distance from the earth to the sky.’**”<sup>17</sup>
  - God has ultimately shown his faithfulness in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ “**Righteousness**” and “**justice**” are also like the two sides of the same coin.

<sup>13</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reybourn, W. D. (1991, p. 344).

<sup>14</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 337).

<sup>15</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 62).

<sup>16</sup> VanGemeren, W. A. (2008, Vol. 5, pp. 273–274).

<sup>17</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reybourn, W. D. (1991, p. 345).

- Righteousness = “רָדַף”<sup>18</sup>: 3. **justness** of the divine judge, —a. as action which rescues, sets to right; —b. as punitive action.
  - The righteousness of God is mentioned twice in this Psalm: verse 6 and verse 11.
- Justice = “מִשְׁפָּט”<sup>19</sup>: 1. **decision, judgement**: a) given by Yahweh, the LORD.
  - The “justice” of God expresses his concern for law and order in his creation.<sup>20</sup>
- Meaning: **He will effectively show his judgments.**
  - Be impressed by his deep and probing judgments, which surmount all human efforts. The Apostle Paul: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Rom 6:33).
- ❖ **“O Lord, you preserve both man and beast.”** Note that there is no distinction between the godly and the ungodly, man and animal. All are created by God.
- ❖ **“The shadow of your wings.”** This is a common metaphor for the protection by God.
  - Ruth 2:2: “May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (See also Ps 17:8; 57:1 61:4; 91:4; Mt 23:37.)
- ❖ **“They feast.”**
  - The terms “abundance,” “house,” “river,” and “fountain” evoke the imagery of the blessedness of wisdom. See also Proverbs 9:1-5. The Lord, the source of wisdom, grants to his children the meeting of all of their needs.<sup>21</sup>
  - “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isa 55:1, 2).
  - “My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you” (Ps 63:5).
  - Compare Psalm 23:5, 6: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”
  - The wicked need to secure their own fortune by evil and deceit. God will provide protection and abundance

<sup>18</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 1006).

<sup>19</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, electronic ed., p. 651).

<sup>20</sup> VanGemeren, W. A. (2008, Vol. 5, p. 273).

<sup>21</sup> VanGemeren, W. A. (2008, Vol. 5, p. 338).

❖ **“Light”**

- Light makes life possible. Light gives joy.
- Light reveals: “But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Eph 5:13, 14).

Verse 10-11 *The prayer to God:*

❖ **“Continue your love to those who know you.”**

- “In verse 10a **know** means intimate knowledge, a living experience, a close relation, and not mere acquaintance or theoretical knowledge about God; those who *know* him, that is, *the upright of*, are the people of Israel who obey and serve him.”<sup>22</sup>
- “**Continue**” indicates that the writer has already experienced the love of God in the past.

Verse 12 *The end of the wicked:*

❖ **“See how the evildoers lie fallen—.”**

- Bratcher and Reyburn comment: “In this closing verse the psalmist speaks of the future destruction of his enemies as something already accomplished.”<sup>23</sup>
- At the same time, it is based on past experiences.
  - Compare Psalm 1:4: “Not so the wicked! **They are like chaff** that the wind blows away.”
- ❖ “Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow” (Ecc. 8:13).

## Application

### Remarks

- ❖ This Psalm can be read and preached at different occasions:
  - The sermon can focus on:
    - The four attributes of God, which can also be applied to human conduct in contrast to the wicked.
    - An strong invitation to come to Christ, the fountain of life and true light.
    - Unmasking the wicked in situations of dictatorial regimes and opposing powers present in the society.

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<sup>22</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 347).

<sup>23</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 347).

Verse 1a

- ❖ “An oracle is within my heart” (NIV) / “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart” (ESV). This reveals the inner thoughts of the wicked person.

Verse 1b-4 *The present situation of the wicked*

- ❖ It is important to have a balanced vision. This Psalms speaks of the wicked, not of people in general. It should be kept in mind that Paul wrote: “(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Rom 2:14-16).
- ❖ This psalm will help to unmask evil and the wicked and to contrast their attitudes, thoughts and feelings with the righteous.

The wicked	The righteous (Mainly based on Proverbs)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. There is no fear of God before his eyes.</li><li>2. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.</li><li>3. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good.</li><li>4. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. There is fear of God before his eyes.</li><li>2. And in his own eyes he doesn't flatter himself too much to detect or hate his sin.</li><li>3. The words of his mouth are faithful and trustworthy; he has become wise and to do good.</li><li>4. Even on his bed he plots the good; he commits himself to a righteous path and rejects what is wrong.</li></ol>

Verse 5-9 *The praises of God:*

- ❖ Praise God because of his love, and faithfulness, his righteousness, and justice.
  - Foremost in Christ, the LORD God has shown his love by sending his son (Jn 3:16).
- ❖ Jesus Christ is the fountain of life and the light of life.
  - “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink’” (Jn 7:37-39; Jn 4:10, 14; Rev 21:6; 22:17).

- “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (Jn 8:12).
  - When people fail, the love of God, his faithfulness, righteousness, and justice will remain to the end, as the Book of Revelation shows.
- We do not have life and light in ourselves! Both are gifts from God.
- ❖ “May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (Ruth 2:12).
- ❖ “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph 5:8-11).
- ❖ God will provide protection and give delights. But, not always during this lifetime!

Verse 10-11 *The prayer to God*

- ❖ This is an important lesson for our personal and communal prayers:
  - Remember the love of God, which he has shown in the past and shows in the present.
- ❖ Which are the adversaries, you are facing?

Verse 12 *The end of the wicked:*

- ❖ It is possible to illustrate this with examples taken from history.

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