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## Psalm 136

One can easily identify a concern with words and language in the Christian tradition. In Genesis, God is presented as ‘speaking’ words of creation and the human being, made in the image of God, is given the task of naming the animals. In the same book, the arrogance of the human architects of the Tower of Babel is punished by confusing the human languages and scattering the people across the earth. In Christian mythopoetic language, God incarnate in Jesus the Christ is also the Incarnate ‘Word of God’. The words of Jesus and those of the early Christian communities are preserved in the Bible, which itself has become “Word of God.”

Of all the ways in which James I of England left his mark on the English language, none was to match the influence of the new translation of the *Bible* ordered in the second year of his reign.

In January 1604, James presided over a special conference at Hampton Court. This was a gathering of bishops and Puritan divines to discuss and reconcile religious differences. Out of their deliberations emerged a plan which would provide the English language with one of its great Renaissance masterpieces, a work whose impact on the history of English has been as fundamental as Shakespeare’s: *The Authorized Version of the Bible*.

*The King James Bible* was published in the year Shakespeare began working on his last play, *The Tempest* (1611). Both the play and the Bible are masterpieces of English, but there is one crucial difference between them. Whereas Shakespeare ransacked the lexicon, *The King James Bible* employs a bare 8000 words – God’s teaching in homely English for Everyman. From that day to this, the Shakespearian splendour of a Joyce or Dickens to the biblical rigour of a Bunyan, or a Hemingway.

*The King James Bible* is still revered throughout the world (Robert McCrum, William Cran, Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English*, Penguin Books, 1987). The immense influence on the English language of the Bible has often been remarked on; for centuries the Bible has been the book which has been most read and most quoted in England; not only many words, but many idiomatic phrases (often the literal translations of Hebrew or Greek idioms) have been added to the English language from its pages. Indeed, so numerous are the biblical phrases which have entered into the texture of everyday English, that it would be a labour of some difficulty to collect and enumerate them all. Among those of which the biblical origin is most obvious are:



Gustave Doré, *The Crown of Thorns*, c. 1866

Apples of Sodom = fruit which, according to ancient writers, dissolved into smoke and ashes when plucked, Dead Sea apple

Balm of Gilead = plant or tree of genus Commiphora yielding fragrant resinous substance; this substance

Safe and Sound = not damaged or harmed at all

All things (are) to all men / people = pleasing to everyone or useful for everything

Daily bread = food, money, and other things necessary for life

In fear and trembling = very much afraid

Feet of clay = a hidden weakness, usually of morals or principles

Gall and wormwood = a bitter taste

Milk and honey = an imaginary place where life is easy and pleasant, with plenty of food

(To wear) Sackcloth and ashes = to do something publicly to show that one has done something wrong (from a custom described in the Bible of wearing sackcloth and ashes to show that one was sorry about something one has done wrong)

A drop in the bucket / ocean = a very small amount, especially when compared with a larger amount which is needed or wanted

A lion in the way / path = a difficulty or obstacle (real or supposed) given as a reason / excuse for not doing something

An eye for an eye = a punishment which hurts the criminal in the same way as they hurt someone else

A fly in the ointment = something that spoils the perfection of something, makes something less valuable, pleasurable etc.

A howling wilderness = filled with howling, as of wild beasts or wind

A labour of love = a piece of work done for one's own, or to please someone else, and not for money or other gain

An olive branch = an emblem of peace

A proverb and a byword = a thing that is proverbial or matter of common talk

A voice in the wilderness = someone whose suggestions are ignored

A wolf in sheep's clothing = a) someone who seems friendly but is in fact unpleasant or cruel; b) something that seems good at first but is in fact harmful

The apple of the eye = a) pupil; b) treasured object

The blind leading the blind = people with little information advising people with even less

The chosen people = any of the various peoples who believe they are chosen by God, especially the Jews

The eleventh hour = the very last moment

The flesh-pots of Egypt = high living, luxuries

The gift of tongues = power of speaking in various languages, especially as miraculously conferred on early Christians

(He's) no respecter of persons = does not respect rich or important people any more than ordinary people

Not a jot or a tittle = no truth at all

Whited sepulcher = hypocrite

A broken reed = unreliable person or thing

The good Samaritan = a person always ready to help the unfortunate

The (hand)writing is on the wall = a business or an organization will not continue to exist for much longer

The Holy of Holies = a) the most holy inner part of a Jewish temple; b) a place where people are not usually allowed to go

The law of the Medes and Persians = an immutable law

The Mammon of unrighteousness = (personification) term of opprobrium for wealth regarded as an idol or evil influence

The little leaven that leavens the whole lump = (fig.) spreading and transforming influence

The old Adam = a person's innate sinful nature

The prodigal son = someone who leaves home and does a lot of things that people do not approve of but still receives a very friendly welcome when they return home

The promised land = a place where someone will be happy and successful

The salt of the Earth = a person or people regarded as good hearted and dependable

(By) the sweat of one's brow = (by) working very hard

The wages of sin = punishment for doing something bad

After one's own heart = similar to oneself or of the type one likes

As one man = everyone together

In the flesh = in real life; in physical form

In the land of the living = (humour) in a state of being awake, especially after being asleep or ill

In the twinkling of an eye = in a very short time

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak = used for telling someone that you would do something but do not have the energy or strength to do it

A leopard can't change its spots = someone will never change their behaviour or character

Whatever a man soweth, that shall he reap = something happens to someone because of what they have done in the past

Off the face of the earth = something does not exist anywhere or cannot be found anywhere

Pride goes before a fall = (saying) someone who behaves too proudly will soon suffer a defeat or misfortune; pride leads to destruction

With the pure, all things are pure = people who are sexually innocent do not understand rude things

A crown of glory = something that gives beauty, distinction or fame to somebody / something

A soft answer = a mild or peaceful reply, especially to some accusation, slight or criticism

**A word in season** = something that is said to somebody, especially as advice, sympathy, warning etc., at the time when circumstances make it appropriate

**The beam in one's own eye** = a major fault in one's own character, outlook etc., which one disregards while observing or criticizing minor faults in others

**A prophet (is) without honour in his own country** = (saying) somebody (is) recognized as a great thinker, teacher, artist etc. except by his own family, associates, countrymen etc.

**With clean hands** = not involved in any activities which are bad or illegal

**To make bricks without straw** = to do a job without the necessary materials

**To kill the fatted calf** = to welcome joyfully and with generous entertainment someone who has returned after a long absence

**To turn the other cheek** = to take no action against someone who has hurt or harmed you

**To hide one's light under a bushel** = to hide, or to be modest about, one's ability or skill

**To gird up one's loins** = to get ready for action

**To cast one's bread upon the waters** = to do something that gives someone no benefit now but may give them some benefit in the future; to be good and generous, without waiting any reward

**To bear one's cross** = to have to deal with something unpleasant, especially continuous for a long time

**To worship the golden calf** = to adore wealth

**To have no lot or part in** = not to be involved in influencing the development of a situation

**To see eye to eye with** = to agree completely with, to have the same opinion as

**To grind the faces of the poor** = to make poor people work very hard and give them almost nothing in return

**To set one's face against** = to oppose firmly

**To wash one's hands of** = to refuse to have anything to do with or accept responsibility for

**To proclaim from the house-tops** = to make known publicly, so that everyone will hear and know

**To call into question** = to raise doubts about something

**To spare the rod and spoil the child** = (old saying) children need to be punished by being hit in order to grow into well-behaved adults

**To give short shrift to** = to give little attention to

**To find favour with** = to be supported or admired by people

**To fall on stony ground** = to receive a negative reaction from other people

**To be built upon sand** = an idea or plan that is not very sensible or practical and is likely to fall

**To heap coals of fire on** = to return good for evil

**To take someone's name in vain** = to speak disrespectfully about someone, without their knowledge, to other people

**To cast pearls before swine** = to give something valuable to someone who cannot understand its value

**To have / take pity on** = to feel or act compassionately towards; to feel sorry and decide to help

**(Let he who is without blame) cast the first stone** = it is unfair for people to criticize or blame someone because they have probably the same thing wrong themselves

**To beat / turn swords into ploughshares** = to change to a more peaceful life, getting rid of your weapons and using knowledge and machines of war to make things that improve people's lives

**To gnash the teeth** = to protest against something in an angry way; to bite your teeth together and from side to side because you are very angry

**To lift up one's voice** = to start to talk more loudly

**To do something by the skin of one's teeth** = to succeed in doing something but almost fail

**To go from strength to strength** = to manage with continuing and growing success

**To be at ease in Zion** = to live in peace

**To beat the air / wind** = to speak to no purpose, to waste words

**To draw a bow at a venture** = (fig.) to shoot an arrow at random

**To take counsel** = to ask for somebody's advice

**To shake off the dust of / from one's feet** = to leave a place without any regret

**To strain at a gnat (and swallow a camel)** = (saying) to have scruples, make difficulties, about doing or allowing something only slightly wrong, but remain unconcerned about doing something really wrong, outrageous, or dangerous

**To search one's heart / soul** = to closely examine one's feelings, motives, the nature of one's action

**To dig a pit for** = to contrive to trap, or trick, somebody or (through miscarriage or mismanagement of one's plans) oneself

**To touch pitch and be defiled** = (saying) one is necessarily defiled by contact with, involvement in, crime, vice, dishonesty, indecency, etc.

**To sow the wind and reap the whirlwind** = (saying) to start something that seems fairly harmless and have to suffer unforeseen consequences that are grave or disastrous

GLOSSARY

*willow* (1.2) = a tree with long thin branches and narrow leaves that grows near water (Rom.: salcie)

*mirth* (1.3) = happy laughter

*cunning* (1.5) = the use of clever methods to get what you want, especially methods that involve tricking or cheating people (Rom.: viclenie)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea,  
we wept, when we remembered Zìon.

We hanged our harps  
upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive  
required of us a song;  
and they that wasted us required of us mirth,  
saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget her cunning,  
If I do not remember thee,  
let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;  
if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.  
Remember, O Lord,  
the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem;  
who said "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof."  
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed;  
happy *shall he be*,  
that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.  
Happy *shall he be*,  
that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

1611

**PSALM 136 IN THE WYCLIFFITE BIBLE.** "On the floodis of Babiloyne there we saten, / and wepten; while we bithoughten on Syon. / In salwes in the myddil thereof, we hangiden / up our orguns. For thei that ledden us / prisoners, axiden us there the wordis of songis. / And their that ledden awei us seiden: Synge / ye to us an ympne of the songis of Syon. Hou / schule we singe a songe of the lord, in an / alien lond? If I forgete thee, Jerusalem, / my right hond be gouun to forgetting. Mi / tunge cleve to my chekis, if I bithenke not on thee." (c. 1390)

**Psalm 136 in Dosoftei's Psaltirea.** "La apa Vavilonului, / Jelind de țara Domnului, / Acoló șezum și plînsăm / La voroavă ce ne strînsăm, / Și cu inemă amară, / Prin Sion și pentru țară, / Aducîndu-ne aminte, / Plîngeam cu lacrimi herbinte. / Și bucline ferecate / Lăsăm prin sălcii aninate / Că acolo ne-ntrebară / Aceia ce ne prădară / Să le zîcem viers de carte / Într-acea streinătate, / Ca-n svînt muntele Sionul / Cîntări ce cîntam la Domnul, / Ce nu ni să da-ndemînă / A cînta-n țară streină. / De te-aș uita, țară svîntă, / Atuncea să-mi vie smîntă, / Și direapta mea să uite / A schimba viers în lăute! / Și să mi se prinză limba / De gingini, jelindu-mi scîrba, / De te-aș mai putea uita-te, / Ierusalim cetate, / Nainte de nu te-aș pune / În pomene-n zile bune. / Să nu uiț, Doamne svinte, / De Edom ce-au zis cuvinte / Svintei cetățîmprotivă, / Cu rău din gură zlobivă: / „Răsîpiți-i zidiuri nalte, / Deșertaț de bunătate!“ / Tu, fată vavilonească, / Răul va să te tîlnească! / Va fi ș-acela-n ferice / Ce-ț-va veni să te strice, / Că ți să va-ntoarce darul, / Cum ne-nchini tu cu păharul, / Cînd cuconii tăi de ziduri / Vor zdrobi-i ca nește hîrburi.”

a) *What is the theme of Psalm 136? (Choose A, B, C or D.)*

- A. God deserves our praise because His endless love never fails.
- B. The joy of harmonious relationships.
- C. Confidence in times of persecution God will bring us through the tough times.
- D. A person on exile weeps over the bitterness of captivity. Our sorrow can make it difficult to imagine singing joyful songs again.

b) *Match the proper name with the explanation:*

- A. Babylon 1. relatives of the Israelites (both are the descendents from Isaac and his father Abraham; they did not help when Jerusalem was betrayed by the Babylonian army).
- B. Zion 2. God destroyed it and its offspring for their proud assault against God and His Kingdom.
- C. Jerusalem 3. a) the name given to a Jewish homeland, either Israel or an imagined nation where Jews could live in peace; b) (poetic) heaven;
- D. Edom 4. David made it his capital; the centre of Christ's kingdom.

c) *Is this psalm? (Choose A, B, C or D.)*

- A. joyful ?
- B. full of sadness?
- C. revengeful?
- D. hopeful?

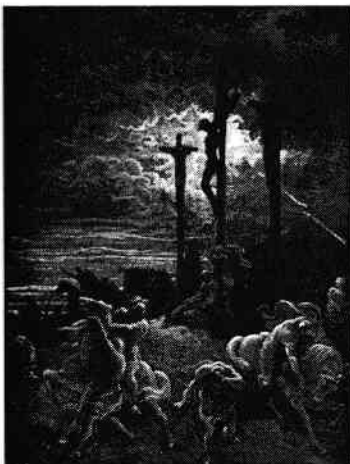
d) *Read the following personality profile and then speak about Metropolitan Dosoftei. Do you know other details about him?*

Metropolitan Dosoftei (1624 – 1693) was a learned clergyman (he was proficient in Greek, Polish, Old Slavonic and Latin). In 1658 he served as bishop of Huși and then, in 1659, as bishop of Roman. In 1671 he became Metropolitan of Moldavia (until 1686). He continued the work of printing religious books begun by Metropolitan Varlaam. As Moldavia no longer had a printing press, he published his books in Poland. His most important work was his *Psalms in Verse* (1673), which contributed to the development of literary Romanian. In 1679 he printed the first liturgy in Romania, helping to increase the use of Romanian in the church service, which had been first introduced in Moldavia during the reign of Vasile Lupu. With a press received from the patriarch of Russia, Dosoftei published his most important work, *The Lives of Saints*, in four volumes (1682). From 1686 he lived in exile in Poland. He died at Zolkiev in 1693.

e) *Read the following personality profile and then speak about John Wycliffe.*

John Wycliffe was first and foremost a teacher, one who took it to be his mission in life to instruct people. His teaching was of a particular kind. He both started from and aimed at religion. It is actually preaching that he had in mind, making the Word of God the matter of his sermons. He insisted on the way of teaching which should be set forth, to his mind, in a spirit of humility. The teacher himself should be more mindful of God's glory than of his own – only under such conditions will the Word have power. With this purpose in mind Wycliffe formed a little school of preachers – *Sacerdotes Simples* – whom he also called 'true priests' and 'poor priests' and whom he advised to go through towns and villages in order to spread the knowledge of the Gospel 'busily, freely and truly'. They were supposed to

Gustave Doré,  
*The Darkness at the Crucifixion*,  
 c. 1866



go staff in hand, barefoot, in long russet gowns of course woollen. And they were also expected to enter any church and preach inside, or, if the door happened to be closed, to preach in the churchyard, or the market-place, or by the wayside. Religion can hardly be separated from society, and Wycliffe's teaching bore witness to that in more than one way. There was first the question of who should come first. Does the Emperor – the source of all earthly dominion – hold his lordship direct from God or only through the Pope? Wycliffe maintained that all temporal possessions were held direct from God to whom everyone was in debt. Ministry was therefore no lordship but a service and the Pope had no right to interfere in State affairs. On the contrary, the State was entitled to take from Pope or Bishop their temporalities if they did not serve God truly or if they were in mortal sin. There is in this philosophy a patriotic resistance to the plundering of England and also an attack on the Friars who, vowed though they were to poverty, had long ceased to be greedy after spiritual wealth. Little do we know of Wycliffe's actual contribution to the so-called Wyclif Bible. The translation proper seems to have been made by his followers but the impulse behind it was undeniably his – his idea that people should turn to the Bible for "the points that be most needful to salvation." In his opinion, the Scriptures are the ultimate authority in man's moral and spiritual life, and this is the reason why one should bring them home to the common man in an accessible way: in English.

f) *The best synonym for a psalm is:*

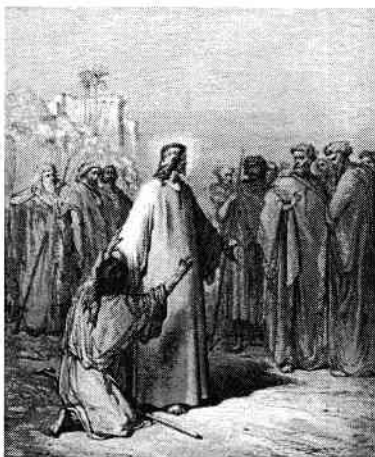
- A. harp,
- B. song,
- C. pessimist,
- D. beatitude

It is well-known that when I want:

- to find comfort, I read *Psalm 23*;
- to understand myself more clearly, I read *Psalm 8*;
- to be forgiven for my sins, I read *Psalm 51*.

Why? In *Psalm 23* God is seen as a caring shepherd and a reliable guide. We must follow God and obey His commands as He is our only hope for eternal life and security. In *Psalm 8* God considers us highly valuable and thus cares for His most valuable creation/people. We have great worth because we bear the stamp of the Creator. As God has already declared how valuable we are for Him, we can be set free from feelings of worthlessness. *Psalm 51* is about David's plea for mercy, forgiveness; and cleansing. God wants our hearts to be right with Him. But sin that remains unconfessed makes such intimacy impossible.

Gustave Doré, *Jesus Healing the Man Possessed with a Devil*, c. 1866





*Simple Past:* ntru oameni și cărți

G.B. Shaw *was* not only a dramatist but also *wrote* numerous articles, essays and political pamphlets.

*Past Continuous:*

He *was still working* as a drama critic when his first play was performed.

Both of these past tense forms make it clear that something is seen as completely unrelated to present time.

- The simple past is used to describe past actions, events or states as accomplished facts.
- The past continuous emphasizes that an action or event *was in progress* at a particular moment in the past. In other words, the action or event had not yet been completed at that moment. The past continuous often describes something that was going on at a time when some new action or event took place. It supplies the background; the new event is introduced in the simple past form. (Background: *was working*; new event: *was performed*.)

*Past Continuous:*

Some pupils *were reading*, some *were talking* and others *were playing* games.

*Simple Past:*

The teacher *entered* the classroom and *greeted* them.

A series of past continuous forms points out that several things were happening at the same time. To describe a number of things happening one after the other (a chain of events), the simple past forms are used.

*Note:*

Past habits are generally expressed in the simple past or by using *used to* infinitive. However, the past progressive is used to present a habit or action as temporary:

My uncle earned his living in the theatre. He *used to* act in musical comedies. That summer he *was playing* in "My Fair Lady."

Gustave Doré, *John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness*, c. 1866

