

Psalms 109:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I am gone like the shadow when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust.

Analysis

I am gone like the shadow when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust. Two vivid metaphors capture David's sense of transience and helplessness. The declining shadow (ke-tsel kintoyo, כֶּצֶל כִּנְטוֹיָו) refers to lengthening afternoon shadows that signal day's end—fleeting, insubstantial, soon to vanish entirely. David feels his life ebbing away, his substance dissolving like shadows before nightfall.

The locust image conveys violent instability: **tossed up and down** translates ni'arti (נִעְרָתִי, shaken off), describing how locusts are shaken from garments or driven by wind. Locusts were both destructive pests and symbols of vulnerability to external forces. David experiences powerlessness—buffeted by circumstances, unable to control his destiny, shaken like an insect from clothing.

These metaphors express existential despair yet remain grounded in prayer. David brings his sense of dissolution and helplessness directly to God, modeling lament that doesn't avoid raw emotion but channels it toward the only One who can restore substance to shadow-lives and stability to those storm-tossed.

Historical Context

Shadow imagery appears throughout wisdom literature (Job 8:9, 14:2, Ecclesiastes 6:12) to express human frailty and mortality. Locust imagery held particular resonance in agricultural Israel, where swarms could devastate crops (Joel 1-2).

The combination emphasizes both transience and vulnerability, capturing the psalmist's comprehensive distress during political upheaval and personal betrayal.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. When have you felt like a disappearing shadow or wind-tossed insect? How did God meet you in that vulnerability?
2. How does bringing raw metaphors of despair to God differ from modern culture's emphasis on 'positive thinking'?
3. What comfort can you find in knowing Christ experienced similar transience and rejection (Isaiah 53:3)?

Interlinear Text

כָּצֵל	כְּנֻטוֹת וְ	נִהְיָ כְתִי	נִנָּע רְתִי
like the shadow	when it declineth	I am gone	I am tossed up and down
H6738	H5186	H1980	H5287
כְּאַרְבֶּה:			
as the locust			
H697			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 10:19 (Parallel theme): And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.

