

Psalms 119:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Analysis

"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" prays for guarded vision. Ha'aver einai mere'ot shav asks God to cause eyes to pass over, avert from seeing shav (vanity, emptiness, worthlessness). The prayer acknowledges that what we behold shapes desire and conduct—hence Job's covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1) and Jesus's warning that the eye is the body's lamp (Matthew 6:22-23). Shav includes idols (worthless things), but extends to anything empty of eternal value that captivates attention. "Quicken thou me in thy way" asks for vitality in God's path. Chayeni (quicken/enliven/preserve alive) recognizes that turning from vanity produces spiritual lethargy unless God simultaneously enliven through His truth. The verse pairs negative (turn from vanity) with positive (enliven in truth), showing that mere avoidance of sin without pursuit of holiness leaves a vacuum.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures bombarded Israelites with visual idolatry—Asherah poles, Baal shrines, Molech altars, Egyptian and Mesopotamian iconography. "Beholding vanity" meant not just seeing idols but gazing with desire, contemplating with attraction. The second commandment forbade not only making graven images but bowing to them (Exodus 20:4-5)—prohibition began with what the eyes beheld. In exile and post-exile, Jews faced Persian and Greek visual cultures promoting different vanities. The prayer remains urgent: guard what captures visual attention.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What modern "vanities" capture your visual attention and subtly shape your desires away from God?
2. How can believers practically guard their eyes in a visually saturated culture?
3. What does it mean to be "quickened in God's way," and how does this differ from mere moral effort?

Interlinear Text

הֶעֱבֵר	עַ יְנִי	מִמָּא וְת	שׁ וָא	בְּדַרְכְּךָ	תְּנִי:
Turn away	mine eyes	from beholding	vanity	thou me in thy way	and quicken
H5674	H5869	H7200	H7723	H1870	H2421

Additional Cross-References

1 John 2:16 (Parallel theme): For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Isaiah 33:15 (Parallel theme): He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

Proverbs 4:25 (Parallel theme): Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

Numbers 15:39 (Parallel theme): And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

Psalms 119:40 (Parallel theme): Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

Matthew 5:28 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Job 31:1 (Parallel theme): I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

Joshua 7:21 (Parallel theme): When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

Proverbs 23:5 (Parallel theme): Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Psalms 119:25 (Parallel theme): My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.