

Psalms 17:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,

Analysis

Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

This verse contains two of Scripture's most tender and beloved images of divine protection. David asks not merely for God's general oversight but for the intense, intimate care one gives to what is most precious and vulnerable.

"The apple of the eye" (ishon bat-ayin, אִישׁוֹן בַּת־עַיִן) literally means "little man, daughter of the eye"—the pupil, which ancient observers noted reflected a tiny image of the person looking. The pupil is the eye's most sensitive, protected part. We instinctively guard it, blinking reflexively at any threat. David asks God to protect him with the same instantaneous, vigilant care we give our own eyes. The phrase expresses supreme value and constant watchfulness.

"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (betzal kenaphekha tastireni, בִּצֹל כְּנָפֶיךָ תַּסְתִּירֵנִי) employs bird imagery, likely depicting a mother bird sheltering her young beneath protective wings. The verb satar means to hide, conceal, or protect—not passive invisibility but active shielding from danger. The "shadow" (tsel) represents the protected space under the wings, a place of safety, warmth, and security.

Both images—eye and wings—communicate intimate proximity. David doesn't ask merely for God's power exercised at a distance but for closeness. The apple of the eye is part of oneself; the chick under the wing touches the mother bird. This is covenant love that draws near, that makes the beloved part of God's own person.

Jesus later used similar imagery: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" (Matthew 23:37).

Historical Context

The apple of the eye metaphor appears several times in Scripture. Moses told Israel that God kept them "as the apple of his eye" in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 32:10). Zechariah warned that those who touch God's people touch "the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8). The image communicated God's zealous protection of His covenant people—to harm them was to strike at something as sensitive as God's own eye.

The wing imagery connects to the cherubim's outstretched wings over the mercy seat (Exodus 25:20), under which God's presence dwelt. Ruth sought refuge "under the wings" of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12). Psalm 91:4 promises: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." The wings represented both God's protective presence in the sanctuary and His providential care extending from there.

David's experience as a shepherd informed this imagery. He had protected lambs from predators, had seen birds shelter their young. These natural observations became theological metaphors. The God who created these protective instincts possesses them perfectly and exercises them toward His children. David, who had sheltered sheep, now needed the Chief Shepherd to shelter him.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does the image of being kept 'as the apple of the eye' reveal about how God values His people?

2. How does the picture of hiding 'under the shadow of thy wings' provide comfort during times of danger or fear?
3. What is the relationship between these intimate protection images and God's covenant commitment to His people?
4. How might Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37) illuminate this verse?

Interlinear Text

שֶׁ מְרִנִּי	כְּאֵיֶשׁ וֶן	בֵּית	עַל יֵן	לְבַצֵּל	כְּנֹפֶי יְיָ
Keep	me as the apple	of the eye	H5869	me under the shadow	of thy wings
H8104	H380	H1323		H6738	H3671
תַּסְתִּירָנִי:					
hide					
H5641					

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:10 (Parallel theme): He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Psalms 91:4 (Parallel theme): He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Psalms 91:1 (Parallel theme): He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Proverbs 7:2 (Parallel theme): Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

Psalms 36:7 (Parallel theme): How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

Luke 13:34 (Parallel theme): O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy

children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Psalms 57:1 (Parallel theme): Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

Zechariah 2:8 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

Ruth 2:12 (Parallel theme): The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Psalms 61:4 (Parallel theme): I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.