

Psalm 32:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

Analysis

This verse presents stark contrast between two destinies—continued rebellion versus trusting faith. '**Many sorrows shall be to the wicked**' uses rab (many, abundant) and mak'ob (pain, sorrow, grief) to describe inevitable consequences of persisting in sin. The wicked (rasha—those morally wrong, guilty, hostile to God) accumulate sorrows through natural consequences and divine judgment. This isn't vindictive punishment but inherent reality—sin produces suffering, rebellion brings misery.

The contrast is absolute: '**but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about**'. The participle boteach (trusting) describes ongoing, continuous faith—not one-time decision but sustained reliance on God. The promise is stunning—chesed (mercy, lovingkindness, covenant loyalty) will sabab (surround, encircle, encompass) the trusting believer. Like fortified walls protecting city, divine mercy forms impregnable defense around the faithful.

This chesed is God's covenant faithfulness—loyal love that persists despite human unfaithfulness. It's the same mercy that forgave David's adultery and murder, preserved him through rebellion, and restored him to fellowship. For believers in Christ, this mercy found ultimate expression in the cross—God's loyal love demonstrated while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). Those who trust Christ are permanently surrounded by divine mercy—nothing can separate from God's love (Romans 8:38-39).

Historical Context

The contrast between wicked and trusting appears throughout wisdom literature—Proverbs repeatedly warns that the way of the wicked leads to destruction while the righteous find security. Psalm 1 opens the Psalter with this same binary: blessed righteous versus perishing wicked. Yet this verse, following David's confession of serious sin, complicates simple categories. David was both wicked (adultery, murder) and trusting (confession, faith)—demonstrating that righteousness comes not through sinlessness but through faith that receives mercy.

Ancient Near Eastern religion lacked this concept of mercy encompassing covenant breakers. Pagan gods were transactional—obey, receive blessing; disobey, receive curse. The biblical God extends mercy to confessing sinners, transforming rebels into beloved children. This mercy forms the foundation for New Testament gospel—God's lovingkindness toward undeserving sinners through Christ.

Church history has emphasized this verse during persecution and suffering. When external sorrows multiply, believers trust that divine mercy surrounds them despite circumstances. Roman martyrs, medieval plague victims, Reformation martyrs, modern persecuted church—all testified that God's mercy encompassed them through suffering. The sorrows didn't disappear, but mercy's reality transcended temporal pain.

The promise isn't absence of difficulty but presence of mercy amid trial. Paul experienced this: thorn in flesh remained, but grace proved sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). Job lost everything but discovered God's mercy sustained him. Joseph endured slavery and prison but divine mercy surrounded him, ultimately bringing vindication. Believers trust not for elimination of problems but for God's faithful presence through them.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How do 'sorrows' naturally accompany wickedness, and what does this reveal about sin's inherent consequences?
2. What is the difference between trusting God (ongoing faith) versus merely believing facts about God?
3. How does divine mercy 'compass' believers—what does this encompassing protection look like practically?
4. How do we reconcile this promise of mercy's encompassing presence with believers' experiences of suffering and hardship?
5. In what ways did Christ's cross demonstrate God's ultimate loyal love toward rebels who trust Him?

Interlinear Text

בַּיהֲנָה הַיְהּ וּבְבָטִים מִכְאֹבֶן יְמִים בְּבָבִים
Many sorrows shall be to the wicked but he that trusteth in the LORD
H7227 H4341 H7563 H982 H3068

סֻמְבָּנוּ שְׁמָד
mercy shall compass
H2617 H5437

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 16:20 (Faith): He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.

Proverbs 13:21 (Evil): Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.

Psalms 147:11 (Grace): The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Psalms 146:5 (References Lord): Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

Psalms 34:8 (Faith): O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Psalms 5:12 (References Lord): For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

Psalms 84:12 (Faith): O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Psalms 16:4 (Parallel theme): Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

Psalms 2:12 (Faith): Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

1 Timothy 6:10 (Faith): For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.