

*a sermon:*

THE CHARACTER OF GOD REVEALED IN PSALMS 86:15

Robert Baral  
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## I. A PROPOSITION

The LORD GOD is good, compassionate, gracious, longsuffering, merciful and truthful.

## II. THE TEXT – PSALM 86:15

PSALM 86:15<sup>1 2</sup>

But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

וְאַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי רַחֲמִים וְחַנּוּן אֲרֹךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת:

## III. INTRODUCTION

What is The Creator's personal nature which is attributed to Him in The Holy Scriptures? We may make a small and humble beginning in discerning GOD's character from PSALM 86:15, which we will attempt to consider here. The Maker of heaven and earth is not an impersonal and distant Creator, having set all that is seen and unseen into being and then - ordaining certain universal laws - walking away in disinterested detachment!

No! What men need to know in this time of trouble - our present cold, sterile, materialistic and very lost age - is that The Creator GOD is personal, good and loving; that GOD is there for people to cry out to from the midst of their distress. And if we may correctly discern some basics of The Divine character, we may see that He is there, seeking to hold us in the palm of His hand within a caring and intimately tender relationship with us, both in this life and in the next. So from PSALM 86:15, we shall see that The LORD GOD is personal, compassionate, gracious, longsuffering, merciful and truthful.

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<sup>1</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>2</sup> 2, BHS, PSALM 86:15.

#### IV. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

The King James Version of PSALM 86:15 gives us, “But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew text is given as this:<sup>4</sup>

וְאַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי רַחֲמוֹם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:

I offer this transliteration: VE'ATTAH 'ADONAY 'EL-RACHUM VECHANNON 'ERECH 'APAYIM VERAV-CHESED VE'EMET.<sup>5</sup> I offer this wooden translation, “And You Lord [are] GOD compassionate and gracious, long [to] anger<sup>6</sup> and great [in] mercy, and truth.” This passage consists of two adjectives describing GOD – “compassionate” and “gracious” – and three direct objects completing the phrase “You LORD GOD are...” – “long [to] anger,” “great [in] mercy,” “and great [in] truth.”<sup>7</sup>

#### V. PUTTING PSALM 86:15 IN CONTEXT

We may hope to understand this Scripture verse better if we briefly place it in context: PSALM 86 itself is a prayer of David to GOD in which he cries out for Divine deliverance, which is evident from the title and opening plea of verse 1, “<A Prayer of David.> Bow down Thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy.”<sup>8</sup> Wycliffe divides David's prayer of PSALM 86 into three sections: 1) Verses 1-5, “A General Plea for Help;” 2) Verses 6-10, “A Confident Hope in a Response;” 3) Verses 11-17, “A Prayer for Guidance and Protection.”<sup>9</sup> Within these divisions of this passage, observes Wycliffe, “...we recognize the sincere prayer of an individual who is in personal distress. The general nature of ...[this prayer for GOD's help] makes the message apply to any person in trouble” in any time and in any place!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>4</sup> 2, BHS, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>5</sup> In my transliteration, I represent the Hebrew letter aleph as ‘ and the letter ayin as ‘.

<sup>6</sup> An alternate wooden translation of אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם would be slow to anger [in the] face.

<sup>7</sup> The verb form of “to be” is not actually stated in the Hebrew text – a common Hebrew construction - but is understood in the English translation to carry that meaning.

<sup>8</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 8

<sup>9</sup> 3, Wycliffe, PSALM 86, page 526, three topical divisions of this PSALM.

<sup>10</sup> 3, Wycliffe, PSALM 86, introduction, page 526.

Walvoord and Zuck offer us a good overview of these three general divisions in PSALM 86: 1) In Verses 1-5, David calls out in prayer for GOD to “...hear... answer... guard... save... have mercy on... and bring joy to him...”<sup>11</sup> David makes this prayer in humble yet secure faith in the unshakable goodness of GOD, Who is: “...kind, ready to forgive and abounding in love.”<sup>12</sup> 2) In Verses 6-10, David’s confidence that GOD would hear and answer his prayer “...is strengthened by his [sure] knowledge that The Lord is incomparable, ...fully able to do what he asks, ... [because] He alone is The Great ...GOD!”<sup>13</sup> David praises The Almighty, “...asking that He might be [given Grace to become] even more faithful to GOD ...[and His greatness.”<sup>14</sup> 3) In Verses 11-17, David’s request for strength and deliverance by GOD from his enemies is based upon the nature of GOD’s character, which brings us directly to our Scripture text, verse 15: “But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth!”<sup>15</sup>

## VI. THE LORD GOD IS PERSONAL

PSALM 86:15 begins, “But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD-compassionate...”<sup>16</sup> We begin with VE’ATTAH ‘ADONAY ‘EL-[RACHOM]... אֱלֹהֵינוּ אַתָּה! Let us note first the personal pronoun – ‘ATTAH - “And You, Lord are a GOD compassionate...” opens this verse, rather than, “But He The Lord is a GOD compassionate...!”<sup>17</sup> Note that David’s prayer is not addressed to the cosmos, but to “You, Lord GOD,” ‘ADONAY ‘EL-[RACHOM]...”<sup>18 19</sup> David was the man of whom

<sup>11</sup> 4, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 86:1-5, Prayer for Protection, paragraph 1, page 856.

<sup>12</sup> 4, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 86:1-5, Prayer for Protection, paragraph 2, page 856.

<sup>13</sup> 4, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 86:6-10, Prayer for Power, page 856.

<sup>14</sup> 4, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 86:11-13, Prayer for Power, page 856.

<sup>15</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>16</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>17</sup> 5, Whitaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 61, B683 אַתָּה, אַתָּה pron. 2 s.m. thou...

<sup>18</sup> 5, Whitaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 10, B147 אֲדֹנָי n.m. lord ...(2) ref. to God, יהוה אֲדֹנָי the Lord Yahweh (v. יהוה)... [one of many combinations of the Divine Name listed in this source].

<sup>19</sup> 5, Whitaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 42, B480 II. אֱלֹהִים n.m. ... god... 6. God the one only and true God of Israel: (a) אֱלֹהֵינוּ the God, the true God. (b) אֱלֹהֵי my God (poet.).

the prophet Samuel spoke in I SAMUEL 13:14, of "...The LORD hath sought Him a man after his own heart, and The LORD hath commanded him to be captain over His people [Israel]..."<sup>20</sup> Here is this David, that great king of Israel, personally beseeching The Almighty Creator of All Things to give his cry and prayer direct attention and ear!

And of The LORD, David personally knew these things: Only a personal GOD Who knows all and sees all would be aware of David's prayer. Only an all powerful GOD would be capable hearing and responding to his prayer. And only a caring and compassionate GOD would bother to hear and take action in answer to his prayer! This is The same eternal and yet personal Creator of whom Saint Paul sings his adoration to in I TIMOTHY 1:17, "Now unto The King eternal, immortal, invisible, The only wise GOD, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen!"<sup>21</sup>

## VII. THE LORD GOD COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS

Now we come to the first word used to describe GOD's character in PSALM 86:15, "But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD full of compassion..."<sup>22</sup>

Here the Hebrew word is RACHOM רַחֻם, an adjective meaning "compassionate" and usually used in Scripture to describe GOD's nature, rather than man's.<sup>23</sup> Continuing in PSALM 86:15, we read that The Lord is a GOD "...gracious..."<sup>24</sup> This is from the Hebrew word in our text CHANNON חַנּוּן, in Scripture "...only used as an attribute of GOD, as hearing the cry of the vexed debtor."<sup>25</sup> And indeed, are not men in debt under The Law of GOD for the payment due to cover their sins, a debt which we on our own merit or good works can not satisfy, but that is forgiven us only by GOD's Grace?

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(c) cstr. אֵל בֵּית אֵל *the God of Bethel*. (c) אֵל אֶחָד *one God*. (e) God (the only true God, needing no article or predicate to define him) always in poetry...

<sup>20</sup> 1, KJV, I SAMUEL 13:14.

<sup>21</sup> 1, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:17.

<sup>22</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>23</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 933, B9308 רַחֻם adj. compassionate; usually of GOD. Once of man.

<sup>24</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>25</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 337, B3276 חַנּוּן adj. Gracious.

Now we may ask, if somehow David knew nothing personally of The Almighty – which was certainly not the case - how might he have come to the certain knowledge that GOD is compassionate and gracious? David knew and believed The Scriptures – The unerring and inspired Word of The LORD to man – where it is revealed that GOD's Presence passed before Moses and personally proclaimed His Holy Name to his servant in EXODUS 34:6, “And The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth!”<sup>26</sup>

Of The Creator's compassionate and gracious goodness and love towards those who love and seek Him, Matthew Henry observes, “...This is that attribute by which He proclaims His Name, and by which we are therefore to proclaim It, ...[as in EXODUS 34:6] It is His goodness that is over all His works, and therefore should fill all our praises; and this is our comfort, in reference to the wickedness of the world we live in, that, however [evil] it be, GOD is good!”<sup>27</sup> This is the same compassionate and gracious GOD The Father Who came as GOD The Son to redeem the souls of men, of Whom Saint Paul gives thanks for the salvation which he so undeservedly received in such great abundance in I TIMOTHY 1:14, “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in CHRIST JESUS!”<sup>28</sup>

### VIII. THE LORD GOD IS LONGSUFFERING

PSALM 86:15 continues, The Lord GOD is “...longsuffering...”<sup>29</sup> This is derived in the text from ERECH ‘APAYIM אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם The first word ‘ERECHE is an adjective that simply means “long,” but coupled with the next word here is best defined as “...[one who is] patient of spirit; one [who is] slow to anger.”<sup>30</sup> The second word ‘APAYIM is a noun for “...nose [or] face,” but also can mean “anger, [both] human [and more]

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<sup>26</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 34:6.

<sup>27</sup> 6, Matthew Henry, PSALM 86:8-17, Petitions and Praises; Prayer for Mercy and Grace, I, 4.

<sup>28</sup> 1, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:14.

<sup>29</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>30</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 74, B842 אֶרֶךְ adj. long..., [but also] ...the patient of spirit; ...one slow to anger...

often... Divine.”<sup>31</sup> So this is a Divine attribute wherein GOD’s face is slow to anger against the sinner, for He is “longsuffering.”


As Matthew Henry observes, yes, “Men are barbarous, but GOD is gracious; men are false, but GOD is faithful. [And] GOD is not only compassionate, but full of compassion, and in Him mercy rejoiceth against judgment [in that He desires our turning to Him, our confession and repentance, that by His Grace, He may pardon and heal us!] He is [therefore] long-suffering towards us, though ...[sadly many men often] forfeit His favour and provoke Him to anger...” when they refuse to turn to Him, when they withhold their confession, when they refuse Him their repentance, when they insist on walking on in their sins, when they deny both Who He is and the worship due to Him! Thereby are the sad fruits of sin filled up in men’s lives, destroying themselves, injuring those around them, and alienating themselves from GOD’s mercy and grace!<sup>32</sup>

But what did The LORD command Ezekiel to remind sinful ancient Israel of, but His great longsuffering which continually calls the sinner to turn and live? For we read in EZEKIEL 33:11, “Say unto them, As I live, saith The Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”<sup>33</sup>

And yet, here is where The Creator’s great longsuffering comes into play for men, even those lost in deep sin. What does The LORD say? He declares His longsuffering – which is great but not limitless - to Moses in EXODUS 34:7, “Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation!”<sup>34</sup>

Yes, as The LORD declares in The Second Commandment, His judgement is upon the idolater and his children up to the third and four generation. But by His lovingkindness, longsuffering and mercy, His

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<sup>31</sup> 5, Whitaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 60, B670 I.  n.m. nostril, nose, face, anger...; mostly anger, human; oftener Divine.

<sup>32</sup> 6, Matthew Henry, PSALM 86:8-17, Petitions and Praises; Prayer for Mercy and Grace, I, 4.

<sup>33</sup> 1, KJV, EZEKIEL 33:11.

<sup>34</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 34:7.



blessing is upon the faithful man who loves Him and keeps His Commandments and his children up to thousands of generations! <sup>35</sup> So Saint Paul sees and confesses that it was only the longsuffering of The Saviour's love which reconciled Him back to GOD in I TIMOTHY 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief!" <sup>36</sup>

## IX. THE LORD GOD IS PLEANTEOUS IN MERCY AND TRUTH

We approach the end of PSALM 86:15, finding that The Lord GOD is "...plenteous in mercy..." <sup>37</sup> Here is declared the The LORD's deep mercy or VERA-V-CHESED, from **וְרַב־חֶסֶד** in the text. This is the great characteristic of The Almighty: "[His] ...lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of His creatures... [especially] in redemption [of His saints] from enemies and troubles; men should trust in it; rejoice in it; hope in it. [This is GOD's mercy and truth, working in His Grace, towards men] in preservation of life from death; in quickening of spiritual life; in redemption from sin; in keeping The Covenants, with Abraham; with Moses and Israel; with David and his dynasty;" and with we who are called by The Name of The Messiah, JESUS CHRIST! <sup>38</sup>

How great and deep is The Almighty's mercy? GOD's mercy is "...abundant; great in extant; it is kept for thousands... [who love Him and keep His Commandments]; it is great as the heavens; the earth is full of it. [His mercy is] everlasting [and] good." <sup>39</sup> GOD's mercy is seen in His "...deeds of kindness, [in]the historic displays of [His] lovingkindness to Israel; ...[in His mercy shown] in the Davidic covenant [and] ...to David; [His] mercies in general...;" and in His mercy and truth, which He shows to

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<sup>35</sup> See 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:4-6. This is a restatement by GOD of His Second Commandment against idolatry, which is the root of all sin: "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My Commandments."

<sup>36</sup> 1, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:15.

<sup>37</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>38</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page pg 338, B3297 I. **חֶסֶד** n.m. goodness, kindness, II. Of GOD, 1.

<sup>39</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page pg 338, B3297 I. **חֶסֶד** n.m. goodness, kindness, II. Of GOD, 3.

all who will turn to Him and seek His face!<sup>40</sup> And how long lasting is GOD's mercy? PSALM 100:5 tells us that , "His mercy is everlasting...!"<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, PSALM 86:15 ends by declaring that the Lord GOD is "...plenteous in ...truth."<sup>42</sup> This verse ends by declaring that GOD is also rich in "truth," from the Hebrew [VERAV]... VE'EMET אֱמֶת This is GOD's "firmness, faithfulness, truth, reliability, sureness, stability, continuance, reliableness... [an innate] attribute of GOD."<sup>43</sup> How long does GOD's truth last? PSALM 100:5 reveals that "...His truth endureth to all generations!"<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, we may with David fully depend upon the great mercy and truth of our Maker, which are part of Who He is! As Matthew Henry puts it, "...He is plenteous in mercy and truth, as faithful in performing as He was free in promising [all His Covenantal blessings upon the faithful!]"<sup>45</sup> So we see that The Almighty is not only The Creator of all that is, but also The "...Kind Friend and Bountiful Benefactor..." to man, abounding in mercy and truth!<sup>46</sup>

It is because all that GOD reveals of Himself is truth, that we may depend upon His promises. And it is because in all that GOD is and does, He is plenteous in mercy, that we may resort to His loving aid and fellowship in both good times and bad! So by The Creator's plentiful mercy and truth, Saint Paul gives thanks that he - a once bloody persecutor of The New Testament Church - became secured by GOD's grace into That Eternal Kingdom Above and a brother within CHRIST's Body on earth below as in I TIMOTHY 1:16: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting!"<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page pg 338, B3297 I. אֲדָרָה n.m. goodness, kindness, II. Of GOD, 4.

<sup>41</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 100:5.

<sup>42</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>43</sup> 5, Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, page 54, B604 אֱמֶת noun, feminine, pronounced 'AMAT.

<sup>44</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 100:5.

<sup>45</sup> 6, Matthew Henry, PSALM 86:8-17, Petitions and Praises; Prayer for Mercy and Grace, I, 4.

<sup>46</sup> 6, Matthew Henry, PSALM 86:8-17, Petitions and Praises; Prayer for Mercy and Grace, I, 5.

<sup>47</sup> 1, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:16.

## X. IN CONCLUSION

The general knowledge that The Creator exists is knowable to all men from the undeniable complexity of the physical world on all levels in both the organic and inorganic. But what men today often have forgotten, and need to know again, is that GOD The Maker is not distant and uncaring, but close and personal. And we may take encouragement from this, and not despair, because His loving character is attested to in The Holy Scriptures Which He Himself has inspired and caused to be revealed to mankind.

Seeking to begin to understand in this brief voyage together the nature of The Creator, we have considered these revealing Words from PSALM 86:15, "But Thou, O Lord, art a GOD full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."<sup>48</sup> As The Almighty revealed Himself and His Holy Name to Moses, so He did to David. And what was their response? In EXODUS 34:8 we read, "And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped [The LORD]!"<sup>49</sup> For David, it was as in PSALM 86:11-12, "Teach me Thy way, O LORD; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy Name. I will praise Thee, O Lord my GOD, with all my heart: and I will glorify Thy Name for evermore!"<sup>50</sup>

And what of our response, my friends, to The Almighty revealing Himself and His Holy Name to us at The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, The Son of GOD, Who has redeemed us by His very precious Body and Blood? What does Saint John reveal to us of The Divine Grace to man in CHRIST JESUS? We read in I JOHN 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!"<sup>51</sup> For, as we have seen, The LORD GOD is personal, compassionate, gracious, longsuffering, merciful and truthful. In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

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<sup>48</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:15.

<sup>49</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 34:8.

<sup>50</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 86:11-12.

<sup>51</sup> 1, KJV, I JOHN 1:9.

## XI. REFERENCES

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