

The Reins of David
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Psa 7:10 (BHS)

יְגַמְרֵנָּא רַע רְשָׁעִים
וְתִכְוֶנְךָ צְדִיק
וּבְחֵן לְבָוֶה וּבְלִיּוֹת
אֱלֹהִים צְדִיק:

Psa 7:9 (NEB)

Let wicked men do no more harm,
establish the reign of righteousness,
Thou who examinest both **heart** and **mind**,
thou righteous God.

The versification is off since the ascription is 7:1 in Hebrew but 7:0 in English. NEB inserts “the reign of” to nuance “righteousness.” Notice the emphatic *na*’ which some translations routinely gloss, “please” (see for example, Gen 19:2 in ESV or NASB). I remember in my first year of Hebrew, the instructor passed to the class, “*Na*’ does not mean ‘Please!’” I then began gaining awareness that translations are approximations.

Which brings us to two colorful words. The Old Greek glosses them *kardias* and *nephros*. (Nephrosis is kidney disease.) The Vulgate reads *cordis et renum*. (Renal physiology is the study of kidney function.) The Jubilee version channels woodenly, “God is he who tries the hearts and kidneys.”

Kelayoth (always plural) literally means “kidneys.” Although today we know the seat of intelligence is the brain, we still speak of emotions in terms of our vitals. One has “intestinal fortitude.” You have a “gut feeling.” I have “butterflies in my stomach.” A “visceral” response. Our verse puts *kelayoth* with “hearts” (another internal organ) to express this extended sense. Similarly, in Psa 16:7, kidneys “instruct.”

KJV glosses “kidneys” for the organs found in animals and “reins” for both the physical and psychological meanings in humans. When the psyche is

meant, newer translations gloss “minds and hearts” (NIV), “thoughts and feelings” (NCV), or “thoughts and emotions” (Holeman). These evacuate all connection with the anatomic metaphor that associated deep feelings with inscrutable bodily organs.

Also, it’s easy to forget that Scripture says nothing at all about the brain, which seems to be just skull marrow. If we only had the Bible—with no knowledge streaming from medical science—you and I might be constrained to confess that the center of consciousness is the kidneys. Bizarre? Think on this:

What if we treated the Bible’s references to kidneys the way we treat Genesis? A concordist approach seeks to find agreement between Scripture and science. Some vigorously argue that for over a hundred years geochronology has been misguided: stratified formations must be a result of discharging floodwaters and not long ages of rains and sedimentation; the universe is 6000 years old. But if we used that same logic with the human body, we might conclude that medical science is misguided and anyone who believes that the brain is the organ of awareness “doesn’t believe the Bible.” Thank goodness we have the sense not to be consistent with our concordism and to rein it in.

Having expelled such thoughts from our minds, let us resume the flow of the argument. In Psalm 7, David asserts his own righteousness over against his accusers. He found relief in the thought that since God “tests” the “hearts and reins” of every person, his divine judgment is welcome to the upright.

God tests your “heart” and “kidneys.” The inner you, the secret part that only you and God know about—this is what he inspects. On Judgment Day,

you will not be held liable for the things you wrongly think are the big issues in your life now. Who cares what college you choose, what career you follow, whom you marry, and so on? The really big issues are the things that today seem small. How did you treat your neighbor this morning? Did you behave selfishly with your spouse last evening or did you get out of your comfort zone to be more considerate? Those are the truly big decisions that will come up later before the throne.

God surveys the inner being. What were your motivations behind how you treated your neighbor? What secret attitude did you nurture last evening? People cannot see a greedy heart: but God can. Others don't know what you really think behind your public niceness: but God knows. Thank goodness that we don't have to earn our way to God's favor! And thank goodness also that, as Psalm 7 assumes, our close walk with our Father makes us better people than we were. As we walk in faith, more and more we concord with Jesus. His inner integrity rubs off on us. The thoughts and feelings of the son of David become ours in the end. This is what the psalm vigorously exudes.

It is to that end that we look forward to David's hoped-for "reign of righteousness." Amen, Come Lord Jesus!